

**Exploring Special Guardianship. Experiences of School Belonging
from the Perspective of the Young People, Guardians and
Designated Teachers: A Bioecological Perspective**

submitted by

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other university.

Signed.....

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Abstract

Located within social and education policy, the central aim of this research is to explore the concept of school belonging of young people who live under the legal status of a special guardianship order (SGO) in the United Kingdom. Literature highlights that a high proportion of young people with a SGO have experienced early neglect and developmental trauma. There is a dearth of research gathering the views of these young people about their school experiences. The Children and Social Work Act (2017) has placed more emphasis on the role of the designated teacher in schools towards this group of young people.

This study comprised seven cases and a cross-case analysis. Each case included a young person, their guardian/s and their school's designated teacher, resulting in twenty-one semi-structured interviews. Adult interviews followed a hierarchical structured interview approach and the young person interviews involved personal construct psychology techniques.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse data within each case. In-depth analysis of young peoples', guardians' and designated teachers' experiences of school belonging was undertaken using Bronfenbrenner's Process-Person-Context-Time framework (PPCT; 1999) as a conceptual aid throughout analysis. This offered the potential for insight into the complexity of the theory of school belonging. The cross-case analysis examined all of the themes generated from the individual cases to identify similarities and variances between them. The overarching themes identified included: Identity, diagnosis, individuality and association, fitting in, connection to others, protection and autonomy, support and intervention, systems as obstacles to support, school processes, school features, and organisational change. The findings emphasise the importance of establishing a broad focus when considering the concept of school belonging, to include the individual's peer and staff relationships, along with school processes and the interactions between the school, home and the wider community. This study provides original, enlightened and new understanding with implications for education and social care policy and school practice.

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Table of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Terminology
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ASC	Autistic Spectrum Conditions
BAAF	British Association for Adoption and Fostering Academy
BESD	Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
CoP	Code of Practice
CPOMS	Child Protection Online Management System
DfE	Department for Education
DT	Designated Teacher
EBSCO	Elton B. Stephens Company
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
EP	Educational Psychologist
ERIC	Education Resources Information Centre
IPPA-R	Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment
MAT	Multi Academy Trust
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PAC-UK	Post Adoption Centre - United Kingdom
PACE	Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy
PCP	Personal Construct Psychology
PPCT	Process Person Context Time
SDQ	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire
SEMH	Social, Emotional and Mental Health
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disability
SG	Special Guardianship
SGO	Special Guardianship Order
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Chapter 1: Introduction

This study is located within the diverse and complex educational and social context, synonymous with 'hard-to-do' research (Berliner, 2002) possibly because it involves 'wicked problems' (Rittel & Webber, 1973) whose 'social complexity has no determinable stopping point' (Tonkinwise, 2015, p. 89). This first chapter will provide an overview of the scope and aims of the study. I will briefly introduce my positionality; the relevant personal and professional experiences which demonstrates how I have come to this doctoral research, before outlining the topic and its importance to the current educational and social context in the UK.

1.1 Positionality

By identifying my positionality (Bourke, 2014) I seek to clarify my personal and professional experiences that may have shaped this study (Qin, 2016). My interest in this doctorate originates wholly from my own identity and experiences of belonging. On reflection my childhood left me with a relatively confused sense of identity underpinning a fragile school belonging. As I developed my professional life, I began to reflect on the influence of my school experiences and how things might have been different.

I am of dual heritage, my father came to England from Trinidad and Tobago, of Asian descent, as part of the Windrush generation. My mother is white and English. I am the youngest of three children who were born and raised in a moderately large, predominantly white city. Throughout my school life and beyond, my uncommon name and my skin colour have invited 'othering', (Borrero & Yeh, 2012). In my teenage years, various life events led to me living alone with my mother, sometimes in a caring capacity, and as my home situation changed considerably, life at my local comprehensive school remained the same, with staff unresponsive to the requests for help from my mother.

As a young adult, I moved to London to work as a teacher in a large, inner-London, primary school, before training as an educational psychologist (EP). Working in inner

and outer London boroughs afforded me the opportunity to see a range of practice, with school staff responding to the needs of a diverse population. Ten years ago, when I returned to the city where I grew up, I began to notice the increasing numbers of families with children being raised by relatives other than their parents, and how staff were often unaware of their home context and its impact on the pupil's school belonging. On reflection, together, my personal and professional experiences have drawn me to this group of children and their families. It has also shaped my approach to the research as a collaborative activity, adopting a constructionist perspective to try to understand how young people living in special guardianship, their guardians and designated teachers (DTs) see, think and feel about the world.

1.2 Research

The central aim of this research is to explore the understanding and experience of school belonging of young people who live under the legal status of a special guardianship order (SGO) in the UK. A SGO is a formal arrangement typically involving a young person living permanently with family members, friends or foster carers where there is often an expectation of maintained contact or a link with their parents and perhaps other members of their birth families. In the last decade, there has been an increase in the number of children who live in special guardianship (Simmonds, 2011). Whilst substantial studies indicate that the permanency of guardianship leads to 'quite strong attachments' (Wade et al., 2014, p. 241) a higher proportion of these placements break down in comparison to children who are adopted (Harwin et al., 2019). Many children living in special guardianship have experienced neglect, maltreatment and loss (Wade et al., 2014) before their placement and there is an increasing body of research which suggests a long-term impact of this type of experience on a child's development (Teicher & Samson, 2016). Research suggests that this group of young people are more likely to experience social, emotional, behavioural and attentional difficulties than the general population (Aldgate & McIntosh, 2006; Selwyn et al., 2014; Wade et al., 2014;).

The primary focus of existing studies about guardianship has been on the home placement and their general well-being and not on the young person's school experiences (Aldgate & McIntosh, 2006; Selwyn et al., 2014; Wade et al., 2014;).

There is a dearth of research gathering the views of the young people themselves detailing their school experiences (Gore Langton, 2017).

My study will aim to co-produce knowledge with the young people involved in the study (Philp & Brown, 2017) through the use of the qualitative approach of personal construct psychology (PCP; Kelly, 1955a). PCP provides a strong theoretical framework and methodological approach to accessing and understanding the beliefs of young people.

The Children and Social Work Act (2017) placed a duty on local authorities and schools to promote the achievement of children who are living in special guardianship, emphasising the role of a DT in schools to identify and meet the needs of this this group of young people. This school responsibility is relatively new and there is no existing research exploring school staff's understanding of the needs of children living in special guardianship and how they can be met. This research will seek to gather information from the designated staff member (designated teacher) about how schools understand and meet the needs of these young people with regard to the pupil's sense of school belonging.

The aim is to raise awareness of special guardianship, and to illuminate the views of these young people, amplifying their voice and the role schools play in their lives. This will enable others to understand and meet their needs by offering insight into how to improve their school belonging in order to promote more positive outcomes.

1.3 School belonging

Allen et al. (2016) offer a context-related definition of school belonging, and propose that 'school belongingness is a student's sense of affiliation to his or her school, influenced by individual, relational and organisational factors inside a broader school community and within a political, cultural and geographical landscape unique to each school setting' (p. 98). This definition emphasizes the connection between the individual and their school within the wider context, broadening the focus of school belonging beyond the individual and their school relationships to the way the individual interacts with the school within its community environment. Much extant

literature considers the benefits of a strong sense of school belonging and this will be elaborated on in the literature review.

1.4 Bronfenbrenner's Process Person Context Time (PPCT) framework (1999)

The complex nature of those living in special guardianship and the complexity of school belonging requires the use of a theoretical framework which can examine this richness and complexity. Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model (1999) offers a framework with which to examine the individual and contextual factors that influence school belonging for children. Bronfenbrenner's framework will be used to explain and discover existing and new connections between the young person living in special guardianship, their guardian, the DT and the wider socio-political context.

This research aims to develop an understanding of the educational experiences of young people living in special guardianship from their perspective, their guardian's and a designated staff member, with a focus on a bioecological view of school belonging. Using Bronfenbrenner's bioecological framework, the research questions are:

1. How do young people living in special guardianship understand and experience school belonging?
2. How do guardians understand and experience school belonging?
3. How do designated teachers understand and experience the school belonging of children living in special guardianship?

This first chapter briefly outlined the aims of this research and the anticipated contribution it plans to bring to educational policy and practice. The following literature review will provide an historical context and background for the research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

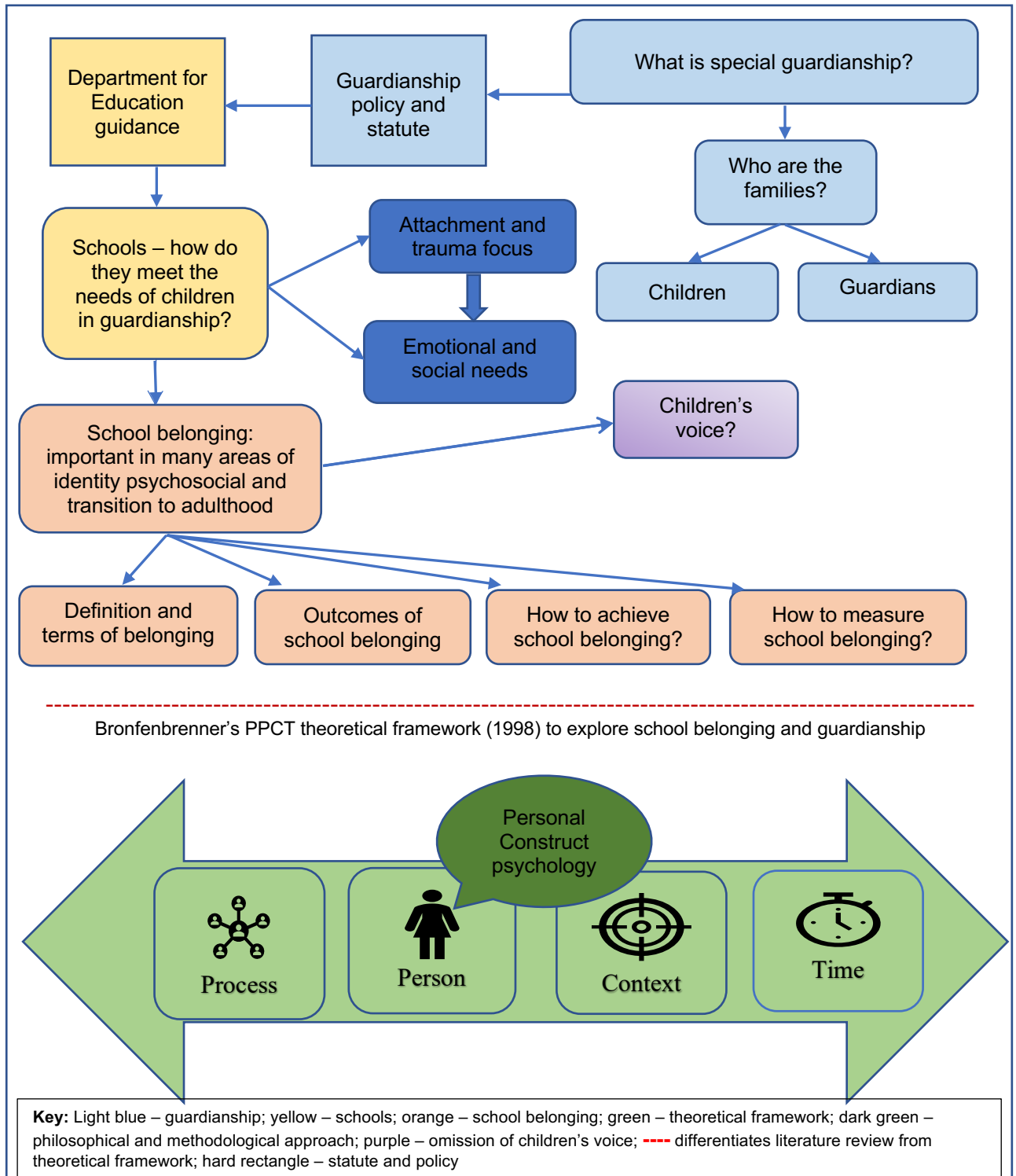
2.1 Introduction

In this literature review I will firstly introduce the UK special guardianship policy and present research about the families who live in special guardianship. I will draw on research highlighting the long-term impact of early trauma experienced by many children in guardianship and discuss the statutory duty schools have to support the progress of these children. I will describe how schools typically meet these children's needs using attachment-based interventions and explore a complementary approach which involves developing a sense of 'school belonging', thus broadening the focus of intervention beyond the individual to the way the individual interacts with their environment. I will present school belonging literature which has been associated with positive outcomes and influential factors within the educational context despite it not having a clear definition and being assessed using a range of methods. After establishing the importance of school belonging and its relevance for children living in guardianship I will synthesise this research using Bronfenbrenner's PPCT bioecological model (1999) as the theoretical framework to establish the context for the current study which explores school belonging with regard to children living in guardianship. Finally, the rationale for the research will be summarised and will include a description of personal construct psychology, its philosophical and methodological assumptions and its relevance to this study.

Figure 2.1 is a concept map and a visual representation of the structure of the literature review. It visually illustrates the interrelated complexity of the study area in terms of statute, policy, research and the theoretical framework.

Figure 2.1

A Concept Map of the Structure of the Literature Review



Relevant literature was identified using a range of sources including the British Education Index, EBSCO, ERIC, Education Research Complete and Google Scholar. A key word search of the terms 'special guardianship', 'special guardianship

order', 'kinship care', 'school belonging', 'belonging', 'connection', 'attachment', 'child voice', 'Bronfenbrenner', 'PPCT', 'bioecological model'. Key papers about special guardianship were selected based on their timeliness and relevance. Publications that were published before 2000 that were regarded as fundamental to the understanding of the concept of belonging/school belonging and to Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (1999) were included. References which were repeatedly cited within relevant articles were also explored.

2.2 Special guardianship

2.2.1 What is a SGO?

'Special guardianship is a formal court order which places a child or young person with someone permanently and gives this person parental responsibility for the child. This could be a grandparent, close relative or a family friend.' (Corum, British Association for Adoption and Fostering Academy; BAAF, *Special guardianship*, para 2, n.d.). Special guardianship predominantly sits within the broader category of formal kinship care (Wade et al., 2014). In the UK, kinship care, also called connected persons or family and friends care (Corum BAAF, *Kinship care*, para 1, n.d.), has been defined as when 'children who cannot live with or be cared for by a parent and who are living with a relative or family friend who is responsible for their upbringing' (Richards & Tapsfield, 2003, The Family Rights Group). The 2011, UK Census reported that approximately 173,200 children were being raised by family members because their parents were unable to care for them (Selwyn et al., 2013, Foreword).

Kinship care can be *informal* or *formal*. Informal kinship care is defined as an arrangement where a child lives with a relative or friend who does not have parental responsibility (*Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities*. Department for Education; DfE, 2011). Selwyn et al. (2013) report that more than 90% of UK kinship care arrangements are not always formally recognised within a legal 'family order'. Formal kinship care includes children placed officially with family with a legal order put in place. e.g. adoption, special guardianship or a residence

order (Nandy & Selwyn, 2013). Although, typically special guardianship involves family members, friends or foster carers can also be granted a SGO.

Custodianship was the precursor to special guardianship, which was designed to give legal custody to a relative or step-parent, who had already been caring for the child, with the consent of the child's parent. Custodianship was framed by the Children Act (1975), (Harwin et al., 2019). Special guardianship was introduced as an amendment to the Children Act (1989) at Section 14A and restated by the Adoption and Children Act (2002) (Wade et al., 2014, p.18). SGOs are made by the family court appointing one or more individuals to be a child's 'special guardian' giving them parental responsibility for the child's care and upbringing (to the exclusion of all others). In a study of 230 guardianship families, Wade et al. (2014) concluded that most of the children were thriving, with 'quite strong attachments' (p. 241) and making good developmental progress and encouraged local authorities to use it more widely as route to leave the care system.

Special guardianship is often used to support family reunification, (Harwin et al., 2019) and when an SGO is granted there is an expectation of a maintained link (regular contact) with birth families and specifically biological parents (Ashley et al., 2015). This means that guardians and young people are sometimes expected to manage a complex intergenerational family dynamic (Kiraly & Humphreys, 2013). A SGO is expected to provide a final, permanent, legal option which lasts until the child reaches 18 years old. However, recent figures indicate that approximately 5 per 100 of children placed are at risk of return to local authority care, in comparison to adopted children where the risk is 7 per 1000 (Harwin et al., 2019). Guardianship is recognised as equally demanding to adoption and fostering but it is not 'typically identified as requiring the same level of skills and knowledge' and is not aligned with the best practice of adoption and foster care (Harwin et al., 2019, p. 9). Guardians receive less social work support and training than foster carers or adoptive parents because there is no regulatory requirement that guardians receive it. The significance of this is that many guardians are left managing children in their care with little or no understanding of the long-term impact that the child's early life experiences may have on their development.

2.2.2 Prevalence of SGOs

Following the Children Act (1989), more emphasis has been put on the value of maintaining connections between children and their families. The numbers of children living with friends and relatives is growing and this has been associated with the changing nature of family life, growth of parental substance/alcohol misuse and an increasing prison population (Nandy & Selwyn, 2013). Simmonds (2011) reported that UK family judges consider SGOs preferable to other options and this is reflected in the increase in numbers. Figures published by the UK Children's Commissioner (2019) indicated that in 2018 the number of children subject to a SGO who had previously experienced a placement in care was 25,438 up from 23,000 in 2017. However, these numbers only represent those children living in special guardianship who had experienced a care placement before the order was put in place. The numbers are also only a fraction of the total number of children living with kin (Selwyn et al., 2013) and are relatively low in comparison to other countries such as the USA and Australia (Brown & Sen, 2014). In 2018, the Care Crisis Review reported that 'families far too often remain an untapped resource,' (p. 28).

2.2.3 Families with a SGO

Selwyn et al. (2014) and Wade et al. (2014) provide two of the most extensive and substantial UK studies investigating guardianship which have yielded much useful information about the placement experiences and well-being of the carers and their children. They identify that guardians are usually family members; often grandparents and sometimes aunts, uncles, siblings. They may also be foster carers or family friends (Selwyn et al., 2013). At its conception, special guardianship policy focussed on guardianship being granted to people who were already caring for the child, such as foster carers or family members (Harwin et al., 2019). However, this is contentious as sometimes guardianship can be granted despite an absence of a close relationship between the adult and the child before the order is made, which can lead to an unstable placement (Wade et al., 2014).

Wade et al. (2014) explored the characteristics of 230 guardianship families and reported that 89% of the primary carers were female; 111 were lone carers (two of

these were male); 51% were grandparents; 41% were aged 50 or over at the time of the order. The discrepancy between the age of the child and their guardians represented a risk factor to placement breakdown. The personal cost of caring for grandchildren, nieces and nephews is high and families can come under strain (Broad, 2007). A disproportionately high level of guardianship families lived in poverty and were often economically disadvantaged; rates of long-term illness or disability amongst carers were higher than in the general population; carer's wellbeing was significantly below average, respondents rarely felt relaxed, or close to other people and lacked optimism about the future (Dunne & Kettler, 2007; Grandparents Plus, 2014, Welland et al., 2017;).

Originally, special guardianship policy was intended to secure the relationship between older children and family members. However, children living in guardianship are often relatively young with a 64% increase in the use of the orders for children under the age of one in 2015 (DfE, 2015, *Special Guardianship Review*; Harwin et al., 2019). The average age children are placed in guardianship is 5 years old, (DfE 2017, *Meeting the Needs of Adopted and Permanently Placed Children*, p. 4). Wade et al. (2014) report that there is high variability of number across local authorities but overall the numbers of those not previously in care have risen. This is relevant because if a child has not previously been placed in local authority care they are less able to access immediate and ongoing support from social and educational services. Brown and Sen (2014) highlight the need for professionals to provide better support to children and guardians.

2.2.4 Needs of children living in guardianship

Wade et al. (2014) identified that a high proportion of young people living in special guardianship experience social and emotional behavioural difficulties, 40% identified with moderate and 10% with severe needs, 24% identified with one or more health problems or disabilities. Twenty-one had a statement of special educational need (equivalent to an Education, Health and Care Plan, EHCP; Special Educational Needs and Disability, Code of Practice, 2014; SEND CoP). If significant enough, these needs might be categorised as social, emotional and mental health needs under the SEND CoP (2014). Other reported areas of difficulty included poor

concentration, focus and confidence (Wade et al., 2014, p. 165). A third of the children had accessed therapeutic (34%), educational (33%) or behavioural (52%) services. Additionally, Wade et al. (2014) noted that carers raised concerns about the primary to secondary school transition and how their children's specific needs would be identified apart from the wider school population.

Selwyn et al. (2013) also provide a substantial study exploring four main themes: moving to live with a relative, security, relationships with family and friends and wellbeing. They interviewed 80 children, aged between 8-18 years, living in informal and formal kinship care and found that overall, the children were 'functioning less well than children in the general population' (p. 67) and similarly to Wade et al. (2014) 34% experienced emotional and behavioural needs that were in the abnormal range (based on carers' scores on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire; SDQ; Goodman, 1997); more children had low scores on the communication subscale of the IPPA-R (Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment) measure of attachment (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) than were found in the general population sample; 39% of scores fell into the abnormal range for expressing and managing their emotions. Some children felt unable to broach the subject of their carer's health, why their parents could not care for them or the exact circumstances of the move (Selwyn et al., 2014).

The wider impact of these needs on the children and families has been reported by Wade et al. (2014): children's emotional and behavioural needs are associated with lower levels of family integration; the children make less progress in school and experience lower levels of wellbeing. Guardians dealing with the most challenging behaviour experience higher levels of anxiety and strain; in families with children with learning difficulties the educational progress and social skills are not as good as in the general population (Wade et al., 2014, p. 235).

Wade et al. (2014) provide a wealth of information about guardianship families but they comment that a limitation of their study is that the children involved were still 'relatively young' (p. 16) and they predicted future difficulties for some of the children though they do not stipulate why.

Common factors for children being required to leave their biological parents are parental drug or alcohol abuse; child abuse or neglect; mental, physical illness or disability of a parent; death of a parent and domestic violence (Aldgate & McIntosh, 2006; Broad et al. 2001). This early experience can be followed by a period of time in local authority care whilst a permanent placement is found. Indeed, a very high proportion of children living in guardianship have experienced traumatic early lives, with high levels of neglect, maltreatment and loss (Selwyn et al., 2014; Wade et al., 2014).

The Special Guardian (Amendment) Regulations (2016) and the Children and Social Work Act (2017) require that in planning permanent placement, due consideration is given to any significant harm experienced by the child, and the parenting capacity of the guardian to address the longer-term impact on the child's development. This latter requirement places a significant responsibility on the guardians as many children living in guardianship are likely to have 'experienced harm' through their preplacement experiences as there is much research which highlights the importance of early relationships with a primary caregiver in forming the basis of future relationships and emotional self-regulation. Teicher and Samson (2016) highlight evidence to suggest that maltreatment alters brain development which impacts an individual's ability to detect threat, regulate their emotions and anticipate reward. Moullin et al. (2014) discuss the child/primary carer bond as fundamental to the child's development and list a number of possible outcomes for those without a secure bond. For example, an increased likelihood of difficulties managing their behaviour and developing literacy skills. They may be more likely not to be in education, employment or training (NEET) after secondary school. Indeed, there is increasing understanding of the potential long-term impact of abuse on functioning and of the role of early relationships in predicting lifelong outcomes (Moullin, Waldfogel & Washbrook, 2014). However, it is also important to provide a balance here by drawing on the work of Sroufe (2016) and Rutter and Azis-Clausen (2016) who present a strong critique of the idea that individuals *cannot* overcome neglect and abuse. Sroufe (2005) avoids a deterministic position and recognises that child development is complicated and that 'established patterns of adaptation may be transformed by new experiences' (Sroufe, 2005, p. 350), thus providing a more nuanced explanation of the role of early attachment in development.

2.3 Attachment theory

The significance of positive relationships in the development of an individual's emotional well-being has long been understood and explained through Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973). Bowlby considered a warm and intimate relationship between an infant and their caregiver to be a primary human need, describing the caregiver's function as the provision of a secure base (physical and emotional security) from which the child is able to explore the world. Bowlby (1973) proposed that the infant's early relationship with a primary care giver helps them to develop an internal working model which provides a template to the child's subsequent relationships. Bowlby's theory was developed further by the identification of attachment categories; secure, avoidant and anxious (Ainsworth, 1978). These categories have been used to develop specific ways of relating to a child in school (Bomber, 2007; Brooks, 2019; Geddes, 2006).

Currently, attachment theory is ubiquitous in education and increasingly influential in shaping school's practice to support children with avoidant and anxious attachment styles, which is behaviour which school staff might typically associate with a child's emotional, social and mental health needs. In practice attachment is used by many as a type of shorthand to indicate that a young person requires interventions which promote a strong and positive relationship with an adult (Smith et al., 2017). However, Smith et al. (2017) contest the *sole* use of attachment theory in supporting children who have experienced difficulties in their early relationships and describe concern that an over-reliance on 'attachment' contributes to the 'biologisation of how we bring up children to the detriment of socio-cultural perspectives'. They propose a shift away from the dominant use of attachment theory when considering how to understand and meet children's needs and to consider complementary ideas which encompass social, political and community contexts (Smith et al., 2017). Thus the work of Smith et al. (2017) concurs with that of Sroufe (2016) in requiring a more nuanced understanding of the transactional nature of 'the many critical influences on development' (Sroufe, 2016, p.1003) and identity formation. Sroufe (2005) proposes that it is necessary to view psychological development through an organisational, non-linear lens which includes the emergence of self and personality (p.351), rather than solely focusing on early relational history. This more transactional

understanding of development is congruent with the use of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological framework (1999) and broader influential factors, such as school belonging.

Indeed, school belonging is a concept which features as an important factor in identity formation, psychosocial adjustment and transition to adulthood. It is a framework which can involve the wider school context from the individual, their relationships, whole school approaches (Waters et al., 2010) and the community. It provides a functional concept for schools to embrace interventions and strategies to promote it (Allen & Kern, 2020 p.3).

2.3.1 School experiences of children living in guardianship

There is a dearth of research about the school experiences of children living in guardianship from the child's perspective as studies have predominantly focussed on the views of the guardians. Indeed, although Wade et al. (2014) report that guardians generally appreciated support provided by school staff they concede that further work is required to raise awareness of children living in guardianship. A limitation to the studies of Selwyn et al. (2014) and Wade et al. (2014) is that although both refer to the children's higher than average emotional, behavioural and communication needs neither directly explore their *school* experiences. Indeed, Selwyn et al. (2014) remark that most children were 'securely attached' to their carers, in spite of their previous relational experiences (p. 16) but they simultaneously report behaviours which are typically exhibited by children with anxious attachment styles (Ainsworth, 1978; Bomber & Hughes, 2013). This is a contradiction and introduces a weakness to their findings.

Further, Selwyn et al. (2014) report that a third of carers experienced no difficulties in school though 'many had gone into school to discuss problems, often relating to concerns about the children's disruptive or aggressive behaviour or poor attitude' (p. 45). They suggest that their study has implications for teachers, proposing that schools should be vigilant to bullying and offer a curriculum which normalises different family types. These suggestions are perhaps too general for children who have experienced the high levels of neglect, maltreatment and loss reported by

Wade et al. (2014) and Selwyn et al. (2014) and therefore seem poorly matched with the numbers of children in guardianship who they report as experiencing additional social, emotional and mental health needs. The implications of this is that these research studies do not provide schools with information which can help to understand how to meet the needs of children living in guardianship.

Aldgate and McIntosh (2006) offers some insight into the school experiences of children living in kinship care (rather than special guardianship specifically) by interviewing 30 children, aged between 8-16 years old, across 24 families. They explored key issues of information about the characteristics of the families and children; information about the placement arrangements, children's experiences of kinship care and issues affecting it. The children's views were sought directly and findings indicate that 36% reporting spiteful remarks being made to them about being brought up by relatives or friends, only 14% said that they were completely open with others about their circumstances and almost one third had no sense of personal history about the significant transition they had experienced. Twenty-two carers thought that their children were 'doing well' at school despite one sixth of the children experiencing bullying, thirteen had to move schools because of their home placements, with three moving again for their educational needs to be adequately met. Just under a third of their participants were making slower progress at school with reasons for this including concentration levels, acceptance of praise, truanting and behaviour. Twenty-five children said that they thought it was important to get good marks and the authors conclude that the children were positively motivated to doing well at school. The authors themselves concede that they used a 'crude measure' to explore how the children felt about school; a three-point scale technique called 'smiley faces'. The results indicated that nineteen felt 'enthusiastic', nine felt 'ok', three responded 'do not like'. The authors conclude the children's lives were 'positive and ordinary' and that 'the majority of children in the study were enjoying positive experiences on a daily basis'. The children were asked how they were feeling on the day that they were interviewed and this is likely to have been strongly influenced by events on any one day. This study provides important information gathered through interviewing the young people directly, which includes some information about the school experiences of the children and young people. However, the focus was broad and did not specifically consider the children's

connection with school beyond their peer and home/school relationships. Hence the need to explore more keenly the educational experiences of children living in special guardianship with a sharper focus on what they consider to be important with regard to their well-being and inclusion within the concept of school belonging.

Gore Langton (2017) speculates that until relatively recently school staff were not widely aware of special guardianship and that many thought of this group of children as 'simply' living with their grandparents rather than 'formerly in care,' (p. 20).

However, the Children and Social Work Act (2017) places a duty on local authorities and schools to promote the achievement of children previously looked after (those who are adopted, live in special guardianship or a child arrangement order). Thus, there is a sharper focus on school communities to identify, understand and meet the needs of this group.

To help local authorities, school staff and guardians to identify and meet the needs of children living in guardianship the DfE and Post Adoption Centre - United Kingdom (PAC-UK, 2017) have published, *Meeting the Needs of Adopted and Permanently Placed Children*, one version for staff and another for parents. In the foreword of the school version, it states that the needs of children who have previously been in care

do not change overnight and they do not stop being vulnerable just because they are in a loving home. Their experiences in early life can have a lasting impact which can affect the child for many years...teachers and schools have a vital role to play in helping these children emotionally, socially and educationally by providing specific support, to raise their attainment and address their wider needs. (DfE & PAC-UK, *Meeting the Needs of Adopted and Permanently Placed Children*, 2017, p. 3)

The response to the duty of care placed on local authorities has been varied between authorities and not all local authorities provide the same structure and scope of support (Wade et al., 2104). In a call for reform to special guardianship policies, Harwin and Simmonds (2019) report that special guardianship is a permanence order that 'must continue' (p. 12) but *how* it is supported needs to

change. They use a statement from one of their participants which highlights the key factors for reform

if the process were clear and equitable across the country and there was clear guidance and the support was equal to that provided for other sorts of placement...it's a really important order that... should be thought about at every opportunity. (Harwin & Simmonds, 2019, p.12)

Harwin and Simmonds (2019) provide some examples of good practice with regard to guardianship preparation and training, for example one local authority holds monthly meetings to address some of the issues associated with guardianship. In the Southwest of England county used in this study the county council have developed a Special Guardianship Team with family support workers and specialist social workers working directly with families to promote the achievement of their children and young people.

The Children and Social Work Act (2017) places a responsibility on schools to appoint a designated member of school staff who can promote the education of children previously looked after, and to ensure that the person undertakes training to understand and meet the needs of these children by effective deployment of resources and strategies to support them. The designated staff member should be the point of contact for guardians. This staff member is generally called the 'designated teacher' and in most schools they are already in post with responsibility for those children who are currently looked after by the local authority. It is likely that most schools will respond to the change in law by extending the role of these DTs to include children who have previously been in care (those who have an adoption, special arrangements or special guardianship order) although not all children living in guardianship have previously been in care. The requirement for schools to have an appointed DT whose remit includes children living in guardianship is relatively new and as such there are no existing studies which identify the impact of this statute on how schools identify, understand and meet the needs of children living in guardianship.

In summary, the significant studies in this area (Wade et al., 2014; Selwyn et al., 2014, Aldgate & McIntosh, 2006) focus predominantly upon asking guardians and children about their placement experiences. The study which specifically asked children about their well-being in school used a method which lacked rigour (Aldgate & McIntosh, 2006). Despite these limitations, together they provide important information about children living in guardianship by identifying that a third of children living in guardianship experience difficulties with peer relationships, communication, high mobility between schools leading to more transitions and complex emotional and behavioural needs, (Wade et al., 2014; Selwyn et al., 2014; Aldgate & McIntosh, 2006).

School transitions, curriculum issues and peer relationship difficulties are reported as stressors for the families (Selwyn et al., 2014). Children and their families experience a curriculum which is not inclusive of their families or experiences (Barratt, 2012), for example, activities focused on family trees, photographs or stories of children's early life and infancy; topics such as drug, alcohol and sex education and teaching about genetics may trigger crises around the child's identity or early experiences, Gore Langton, (2017). The Children and Social Work Act (2017) requires a sharper focus on local authorities and school to meet the needs of children in special guardianship. Notwithstanding the findings of Wade et al. (2014), Selwyn et al. (2014) and Aldgate and McIntosh, (2006), a gap in the literature is evident with regard to the views of these children about school (Gore Langton, 2017; Harwin et al., 2019). A future research priority is to explore the views of children and young people living in special guardianship (Harwin et al., 2019) and this study aims to contribute to that area with a focus on their school experiences and sense of belonging.

2.4 Belonging and school belonging

2.4.1 What is belonging?

Belonging has been researched across the disciplines of education, psychology and sociology (Slaten et al., 2016). Belonging is a commonly used word which represents an important psychological construct with those who report a strong sense of

belonging more likely to report psychological and physical benefits (Begen & Turner-Cobb, 2014; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010; Jetten et al., 2009). In his hierarchy of needs, Maslow (1954) identified belonging as one of our fundamental 'needs' following the importance of physiological and safety needs. Slaten et al. (2016) propose that Maslow's work has provided an important psychological construct which has inspired further research on human motivation. Despite its common usage, belonging has been described as a 'complex and philosophical concept with deep emotional and historical connections, and diverse interpretations' (Wastell & Degotardi, 2017). Bauminster and Leary (1995) present a *belongingness hypothesis* stating that 'human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships,' (p. 497), They suggest two key features of belongingness: the need for 'frequent, affective pleasant' personal contact with others and that the contact must take place within the context of a 'temporally stable and enduring framework of affective concern for each other's welfare' (p. 497), which requires an in-depth reciprocal social connection (Slaten et al., 2016). Hagerty et al. (1992) propose that belonging involves both the experience of feeling valued and the perception of involvement in a social system or environment.

A sense of belonging plays a particularly important role in adolescent development when young people begin to explore who they are and are influenced by adults and peers who are outside their family group (Erikson, 1968, see also Davis, 2012; O'Connor et al., 2010). Adolescents are at high risk of feeling isolated and so belonging at this life stage can be considered to be a protective factor (Goodenow, 1993a). In the publication *Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools*, the DfE (2018) identifies a sense of belonging as an important school factor stating that 'school should be a safe and affirming place for children where they can develop a sense of belonging and feel able to trust and talk openly with adults about their problems' (p. 13). Belonging is therefore an important element of school participation (Osterman, 2000) and a familiar term in education (McMahon et al., 2007).

2.4.2 What is school belonging?

Despite the reported psychological benefits of belonging, the construct of school belonging attracts a range of terminology such as school bonding, school connectedness, school relatedness, school attachment (Hallinan, 2008), school climate, notions of territory and orientation to school (Libbey, 2004). This introduces Wittgenstein's (1953) family-resemblance philosophy to the concept of belonging, and school belonging: that a complex concept can be understood as a 'network of overlapping similarities' (Yeung et al., 2012, p. 1). Slaten et al. (2016) concede that some consistent themes emerge across the concept of belonging, but they raise concerns that the broad range of similar terminology might 'dilute the potency of research drawn from the field' (Slaten et al., 2016, p. 5). Indeed, Colquhoun et al. (2014) support the general practice of more common terminology in order to improve syntheses of evidence and research findings across settings.

Similarly to the concept of belonging, there is no clear definition of school belonging. Goodenow and Grady (1993a) define belonging to school as 'the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the school social environment' (p. 80). Williams and Downing (1998) echo Goodenow and Grady (1993a) in defining school belonging as a psychological construct related to feelings of acceptance and value within the school community. More recently, Craggs and Kelly (2018a) provide a definition 'feeling safe to be yourself in and through relationships with others in the school setting,' which focuses strongly on the relational aspects of belonging within schools.

Allen et al. (2016) give a more context-related definition and propose that 'school belongingness is a student's sense of affiliation to his or her school, influenced by individual, relational and organisational factors inside a broader school community and within a political, cultural and geographical landscape unique to each school setting' (p. 98). The latter definition emphasises the connection between the individual and their school within the wider context, broadening the focus of school belonging beyond the individual and their school relationships to the way the individual interacts with the school within its community environment and this is the working definition underpinning this study.

2.4.3 Why is school belonging important?

Despite the variety of synonymous terms and the imprecise definition there is much empirical research which indicates that a pupil's sense of school belonging is associated with many long lasting, important psychological benefits related to school life such as identity, relationships, agency and security (Ibrihim & Zaatari, 2020; McMahon et al., 2007; Riley, 2019); learning, motivation and engagement (Becker & Luthar, 2003; Combs, 1982; Osterman, 2000); enhanced academic achievement and psychosocial well-being for students with disabilities (McMahon et al., 2008); higher end of year grades and higher student expectations for success and value of school work (Freeman et al., 2007). Strong feelings of school belonging also correlate with positive self-esteem, (Ma, 2003). Indeed, school belonging has been found to be second only to family connection in protecting children against emotional distress, eating disorders and suicide (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009).

Conversely, a reduced sense of school belonging has been associated with lower academic success (Anderman, 2003; Korpershoek et al., 2019) with a predictive link between school belonging and future mental health problems, (Shochet et al., 2006). School belonging is a significant predictor of negative affect in adolescents (Shochet, et al., 2011). Research indicates that young people who experience a low sense of belonging are more likely to engage in risky behaviours such as substance abuse, antisocial behaviour and early sexual activity (McNeely et al., 2002; Resnick et al., 1993). They are also more likely to leave education before the statutory age (Osterman, 2000). It seems reasonable, based on these findings, that schools should seek to promote a strong sense of belonging. However, Anderman (2002) carried out a large scale study involving 90,118 students who completed in-school questionnaires with a subsample of 20,745 interviewed in their homes and found that higher levels of aggregated school belonging were related to increased reports of 'social rejection and school problems' and academic achievement in individual students who felt that they did not belong. Thus, Anderman (2002) posits that in a school environment which is perceived by many of its students to be supportive, there may be problematic psychological outcomes for those students who do not feel supported.

2.4.4 Factors which influence school belonging

The positive outcomes associated with school belonging has meant that many researchers have explored its relevance to specific groups of children from different cultures and experiences: children with autism (Pesonen et al., 2015); Latino children (Kuperminc et al., 2008); African American boys (Boston & Warren, 2017); early years children (Wastell & Degotardi, 2017), children who have experienced managed moves (Craggs & Kelly, 2018b) and those with identified special educational needs (Nepi et al., 2013). From these and many other studies a variety of influential factors of school belonging have been identified and reported, such as:

Promoting a sense of school belonging was found to be particularly important at transition from primary to secondary school because this is a time when a pupil's sense of school belonging is at risk which can lead to an increase in depressive symptoms (Newman et al., 2007). Further, experiencing mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression reduces pupil's sense of belonging (McMahon et al., 2008) indicating a bi-directional effect of belonging on well-being (Slaten et al., 2016). Importantly, focusing on school belonging at times of transition has a positive impact on symptoms of depression and anxiety (Lester et al., 2013).

A major influence on an individual's sense of school belonging is a pupil's relationships with their peers and adults in school (Midgen et al., 2019). Factors such as teacher support: their nurturing approach and accessibility; fairness; emotional and practical support; help with academic and other problems (Allen & Kern, 2017; Anderman, 2003; Greenwood & Kelly, 2018; McNeely & Falci, 2004; Sugden, 2013; Wastell & Degotardi, 2017). Having friends in class (Williams & Downing, 1998), peer interaction and acceptance also improves a sense of school belonging (Goodenow, 1993a; Midgen et al., 2019) and this can be developed through school or extracurricular activities and special interests (Bower, et al., 2015; Midgen et al., 2019).

The school curriculum and aspects of teaching and learning such as preparation and planning, personalisation and adaptation (Loukas et al., 2010; Rahman, 2013) are

influential factors of school belonging which enable participation and engagement in classroom activities leading to higher grades (Biag, 2016).

Organisational culture is relevant to school belonging: leadership; policies and procedures, for example, effective management of bullying; promotion of feelings of safety and nurture (Cunningham, 2007; Greenwood & Kelly, 2018; Hallinan, 2008; Shochet et al., 2006). Further, Frostick et al. (2018) found that the broader educational context of academisation has an impact on school connectedness. Of their sample of 1,284 adolescents, those in academies experienced significantly higher levels of connectedness than those at non-academy schools, and in turn they found that this had a positive impact on mental health. The authors concede that more work is required to identify why this might be.

Lee and Smith (1995) suggest that school size might impact upon a pupil's sense of belonging, however, Anderman (2002) found that although a smaller size might be associated with positive outcomes, alone it was unrelated to perceptions of belonging. Instead, he suggested that location plays its part with reports of belonging as lower in urban schools than in suburban schools and lower in schools that used buses to bring children to school than those that did not (Anderman, 2002).

The physical environment of schools has also been associated with school belonging, for example, the availability of recreational spaces, opportunities to play and socialise (Anderson et al., 2004; Midgen et al., 2019) the school's cleanliness and its aesthetics (Biag, 2016) are relevant variables.

Finally, Greenwood and Kelly (2018) carried out a systematic literature review of qualitative studies exploring staff perspectives on factors which influence school belonging. They found that systems which promote information sharing and school identity beyond the school environment is helpful, such as home/school communication and multiagency links (Anderson et al., 2006), uniform and school photographs (Flitcroft & Kelly, 2016).

Hence, much extant research identifies a broad range of factors influencing school belonging, from individual to systemic, though only a small proportion have focused

on gathering the young person's voice (Nind et al., 2012) and none specifically explores which factors have an impact on young people living in guardianship.

2.4.5 How to assess school belonging?

Thus, an increasing number of studies have associated school belonging with positive outcomes (Anderman, 2002). However, as stated, there is no single definition and there are a wide variety of terms. Despite this ambiguity, attempts have been made to measure it very often using quantitative approaches to gather student survey data (Chapmana et al., 2014). Allen and Kern (2017) provide a meta-analysis of studies which have used quantitative methods to identify influential factors on school belonging. The studies they include are underpinned by specific epistemological assumptions that school belonging is quantifiable and therefore measurable. Over the years a variety of measures have been developed including the School Engagement–Withdrawal Scale (Braithwaite, 1996) ranging from 'absence of belongingness' to 'presence of belongingness', the Simple School Belonging Scale (SSBS; Whiting et al., 2017), School Belonging Scale (SBS; Parada, 2019), School Connectedness Scale for use with adolescents (Lohmeier & Steven, 2011), the Belonging Scale (Frederickson et al., 2007) adapted from the Psychological Scale of School Belonging (PSSB; Goodenow, 1993b). The PSSB was developed 'to assess the adolescent's perceived belonging or psychological membership in the school environment' (Goodenow, 1993b, p. 79). It includes an 18 item, 5-point Likert format ranging from 1 to 5 and is considered to be highly reliable and valid. Studies using belonging scales have enabled large scale survey type research whose findings are intended to be generaliseable and are often used to provide insight into interventions and strategies which increase school belonging (Ye & Wallace, 2014). Thus, potentially forming a valuable body of research relating to a concept which seems to be fundamental to young people's positive outcomes in school.

Although there is strength in using these questionnaires (with high rates of validity and reliability) one criticism of them is their potential to oversimplify the concept of belonging. The use of the scales reflect the researcher's preemptive approach to understanding the concept of belonging and this may be considered as reductionist.

However, to abandon the findings of previous studies which have relied upon quantitative methods would be significantly limiting here and arguably the problem of reductionism exists only if one holds the belief that there is more to say about school belonging than the scales can capture. Alternatively, other researchers have used a more nuanced approach using mixed methods or purely qualitative approaches, which can be viewed as distinguishable from and complementary to the large-scale survey approach. These researchers might be perceived as preferring to explore the 'thick description' of the participant's perspective (Geertz, 1973, p. 1), assuming a dynamic and negotiated reality.

Greenwood and Kelly (2018) carried out a systematic review of studies which have used qualitative methods to explore staff perception of school belonging in secondary schools. They included five papers (reduced from an initial 328) most relevant to answering their research question. The findings of their review highlights school belonging as a framework for practice which can successfully support young people at secondary schools, but they fail to include studies which have endeavoured to represent the voice of the young people themselves. Indeed, the proportion of studies relating to school belonging which have centered on gathering the young person's voice using qualitative methods is very small (Nind et al., 2012).

Hence, it can be argued that in both areas of study; special guardianship and school belonging, the voice of the child has not been gathered sufficiently to represent their view and the importance of this will be discussed next.

2.5 The voice of the child

The importance of including child's views in research is underpinned by Articles 12 and 13 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC; 1989) which states that 'Children are capable of forming views, have a right to receive and make known information, to express an opinion, and to have that opinion taken into account in any matters affecting them.' Kellett (2005) supports the inclusion of children's views in research because 'children observe with different eyes, ask different questions...have different concerns' (p. 5). More recently, the Children and Families Act (2014) and its guidance, the SEND CoP (2014) provide a clear focus on

the importance of understanding the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people in their assessments. It states that children must participate and be involved in discussions and decisions about their educational provision and that all professionals should enable children and young people to make choices for themselves (1.40 p. 28). Both the UNCRC (1993) and the SEND CoP (2014) emphasise the need to gather the views of the child and although some researchers report a 'huge increase' in research exploring children's experiences (Lundy, 2018) there are those which contend that children's voices remain largely absent from some areas of study. School belonging and special guardianship are both examples of this (Gore Langton, 2017; Greenwood & Kelly, 2018; Wastell & Degotardi, 2017) with extant research into special guardianship more often focused upon the perspectives of the guardians (Dunne & Kettler, 2007; Gore Langton, 2017; Pinson-Millburn et al., 1996).

The practice of how to meaningfully include children in research has been considered over time. Hart (1997) proposes a metaphor called the Ladder of Participation which identifies eight degrees of involvement of children and young people. The degrees range from the lowest; manipulation, decoration and tokenism, to the highest; where the young person initiates a project, works in partnerships and shares decision making with adults. This is a relatively simple framework in terms of the concept of children's voice in research, but it has been very influential in understanding good practice for children's participation (Kellett, 2005, p. 5). It is possible that the aim of many researchers might be to try to involve children at the higher degrees rather than the lower degrees of Hart's Ladder (1997). Indeed, Kellett (2005) warns of tokenism when involving children in research, criticising the likelihood of an adult focus, adult manipulation and unequal power relations.

More recently however Lundy (2018) challenges the classification of tokenism as 'non-participation' and whilst promoting the endeavour towards meaningful involvement she defends the practice of including children even if their involvement cannot be 'achieved meaningfully'. She argues that denying individuals the right to participate because 'full compliance' might not be possible is not a reason to exclude them and that face-to-face engagement can be positive despite seemingly being tokenistic (Marshall et al., 2015). Further, Lundy suggests that even 'low entry point'

involvement (Cousens, 2017) might enable children to develop their own sense of agency. This being said, when the aim of a study is towards exploring children's views then the methods required are likely to involve a high level of participation within acceptable ethical boundaries. This presents a challenge: which methods can researchers use to elicit the voice of the child or young person whilst balancing the 'potential harm and benefit to children who are invited to speak...about their views'? (Birnbaum, 2017, p. 6) A useful philosophical and methodological approach here, I believe, is the use personal construct psychology which follows in section 2.7.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

2.6.1 Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory

This study accepts that both belonging and school belonging are important and complex psychological concepts, the former encompassing the latter. School belonging involves an interrelated network of individual and wider contextual factors. As previously stated, Allen et al. (2016) provide a more context-related definition than that of Goodenow and Grady (1993a) and propose that 'school belongingness is a student's sense of affiliation to his or her school, influenced by individual, relational and organisational factors inside a broader school community and within a political, cultural and geographical landscape unique to each school setting' (p. 98).

As such, this study will apply Urie Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of Process Person Context Time (PPCT) (Bronfenbrenner, 1999) as a framework to examine the individual and contextual factors that influence school belonging for children living in special guardianship (Figure 2.2). Bronfenbrenner's framework can be used to explain and discover existing and new connections between the young person living in special guardianship, their guardian, the DT and the wider socio-political context. In using this framework the intention is to avoid focussing on an internal, individual phenomenon and to present this group of children's experience of belonging as a multidimensional construct. In 2016, Allen et al. applied Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological framework to the concept of school belonging exploring secondary school influences on belonging. They used it to highlight

interventions which promote school belonging at an individual, classroom and organisational level. However, their work draws on studies which predominantly used quantitative data. Further, the authors used a limited iteration of Bronfenbrenner's model by focusing on the person (P) and context (C) characteristics, omitting the process (P) and time (T) characteristics. Tudge et al. (2009) stress the importance of being explicit when using Bronfenbrenner's theoretical models to distinguish between his earlier work and the ecological theory in its 'mature' form (p198).

Tudge et al. (2009) describe two central propositions existing in the PPCT theory, the first states:

Human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects and symbols in its immediate external environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time. Such enduring forms of interaction in the immediate environment are referred to as proximal processes. (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 996 in Tudge et al., 2009 p. 200).

For example, when a primary carer plays with their toddler both of them 'make sense of their world and understand their place in it, and both play their part in changing the prevailing order while fitting into the existing one' through their interaction (Tudge et al., 2009, p. 200).

Their second proposition states that:

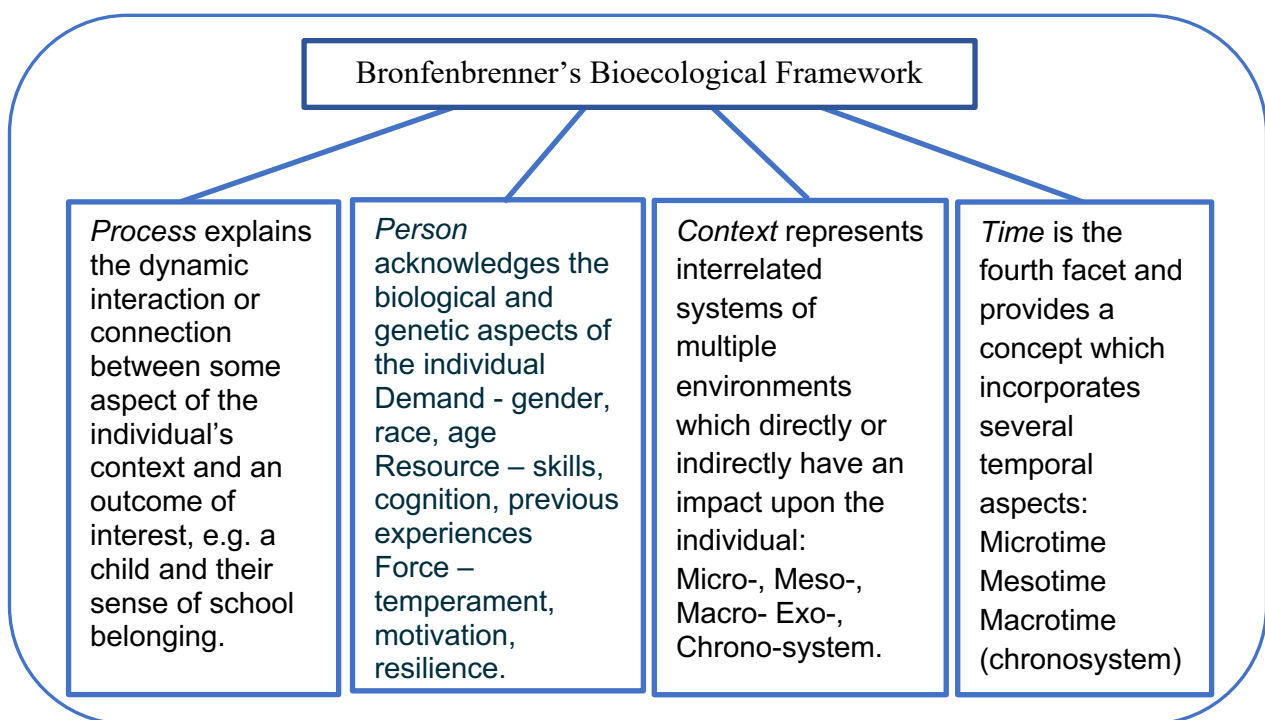
The form, power, content and direction of the proximal processes effecting development vary systematically as a joint function of the characteristics of the developing person; of the environment – both immediate and more remote – in which the processes are taking place; the nature of the developmental outcomes under consideration and the social continuities and changes occurring

overtime time through the life course and the historical period during which the person has lived. (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 996 in Tudge et al., 2009, p. 200).

Tudge et al. (2009) provide a helpful overview of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model describing the four facets of development (PPCT) and focussing on their interrelatedness within a context of relative change and constancy (p. 201). A summary of their key points is presented in Figure 2.2

Figure 2.2

Bronfenbrenner's PPCT Model (1999) - Four Facets of Development



1. *Process* explains the dynamic interaction (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) or connection between some aspect of the context or of the individual and an outcome of interest (Tudge, et al., 2009, p.199). Proximal processes play a vital role in identifying and exploring the child within their system and can be split into four subcategories: Form (the form the relationships take), content (the content of the relationship), power (the intensity of the relationship) and direction (whether the processes are moving to or away from the young person).

2. *Person* acknowledges the biological and genetic aspects of the individual such as gender, race, age, previous experiences. This also refers to the personal characteristics that individuals bring to a social situation (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). They categorised these characteristics as *demand, resource* and *force*:
 - a) Demand – such as age, gender and physical appearance. These characteristics are an immediate stimulus to another and may be acted upon because of preconceived ideas and expectations. These characteristics relate to mental and emotional resources such as past experiences, skills and cognition. They also relate to social and material resources such as food, housing, education.
 - b) Resource – these characteristics are not immediately apparent and can sometimes be induced from the demand characteristics. These characteristics relate to mental and emotional resources such as skills, cognition and past experiences. They also relate to social and material resources such as food, housing and education (Tudge et al., 2009).
 - c) Force – characteristics which involve temperament, motivation and resilience. For example, Allen et al. (2016) report on three force characteristics which correlate with school belonging; academic motivation, emotional stability and personal characteristics. They comment that the relationship between these characteristics and school belonging is likely to be bidirectional. Frydenberg et al. (2009) found that students who were able to self-regulate their emotions and behaviour were more likely to experience a greater sense of school belonging.

3. Tudge et al. (2009) explain that the PPCT model indicates the passive or active role an individual can have in their life. A passive role is one in which the individual changes their environment simply by being in it, this might be due to demand characteristics. An active role is one in which the individual changes their environment linked to their resource characteristics and/or their force characteristics. The third facet of development is *context*.
Bronfenbrenner proposed four interrelated systems which represent multiple

environments which either directly or indirectly have an impact upon the young person:

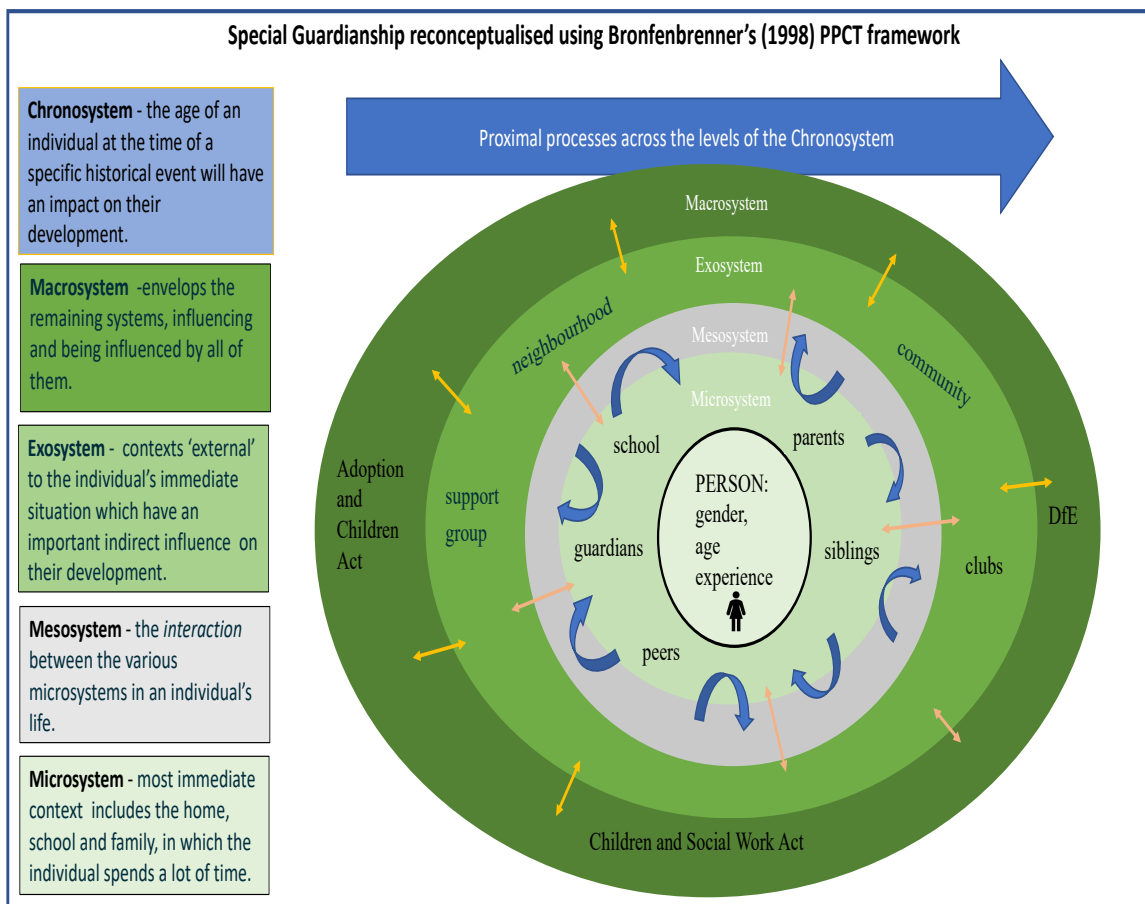
- a) **Microsystem** - the most immediate context for development and includes any environment such as home, school, family, in which the individual spends a lot of time interacting or engaging in activities. For example, parents and guardians have been found to play an important role in nurturing school belonging by providing support and interest towards school activities (Wang & Eccles, 2012). Teacher support is also an important factor (Brewster & Bowen, 2004). Participating in extracurricular activities have been found to influence school belonging (Drolet & Arcand, 2013).
- b) **Mesosystem** – the *interaction* between the various microsystems in an individual's life. The mesosystem explores the bidirectional interactions of the microsystems and includes many variables. School vision, mission statements, school rules and discipline are all influential on the mesosystem (Brown & Evans, 2002).
- c) **Exosystem** – represents the important contexts which are 'external' to the individual's immediate situation but which have an important indirect influence on their development, for example, where a family has connected with a guardian support group or where schools work cooperatively to provide managed moves to other schools. These systems are more difficult to examine empirically because of difficulties involving cost and time (Allen et al., 2016).
- d) **Macrosystem** – envelops the remaining systems, influencing and being influenced by all of them (Tudge et al., 2009, p.201). For a particular set of values to impact on an individual's development it must be experienced within one or more of their microsystems, for example, present and past legislation and policy such as the guidance for schools and parents about special guardianship (DfE, 2017), policy about access to the Adoption Support Fund for children previously looked after, pressures on schools to include, to achieve and show good levels of progress are macro-level influences.

4. Time is the fourth facet and provides a concept which incorporates several temporal aspects:
 - a) Microtime – what happens during the course of a specific activity
 - b) Meso-time – the consistency of activities and interactions which occur in the individual’s life
 - c) Macrotime (chronosystem) – the age of an individual at the time of a specific historical event will have an impact on their development.

Figure 2.3 is a visual reconception of Bronfenbrenner’s (1999) PPCT framework mapping on it some contextual elements of special guardianship.

Figure 2.3

Bronfenbrenner’s (1999) PPCT Framework Mapping Some Contextual Elements of Special Guardianship.



2.7 Rationale for this research

To summarise and provide a rationale for this research, recent literature indicates that there has been a marked increase in the number of children who live in special guardianship in the UK (Simmonds, 2011) with the average age of placement being 5-years-old (Meeting the Needs of Adopted and Permanently Placed Children, DfE, 2017). Guardians are often grandparents, a high number are female, single carers, a disproportionate number live in 'poverty' (Selwyn et al., 2014). Further, there is an expectation that children living in guardianship maintain regular contact with their biological parents (Ashley, Aziz & Braun, 2015). Whilst a substantial study indicates that the permanency of guardianship leads to 'quite strong attachments' (Wade et al., 2014, p. 241) a higher proportion of these placements break down in comparison to children who are adopted (Harwin et al., 2019). This may be associated with the fact that many children have experienced neglect, maltreatment and loss (Wade et al., 2014) before their placement and there is an increasing body of research which suggests a long-term impact of this type of experience on a child's development (Teicher & Samson, 2016). These difficulties may be exacerbated by the inconsistent contact the young people sometimes experience with their parents and other family contact following their placement. Research suggests that this group of young people are more likely to experience social, emotional, behavioural and attentional difficulties than the general population (Aldgate & McIntosh, 2006; Selwyn et al., 2014; Wade et al., 2014).

Despite the rapid rise in numbers of children and young people being placed in guardianship there are only a handful of significant studies which explore their placement experiences and although these include gathering the views of guardians and the young people, there is more work that needs to be done and most recently Harwin et al. (2019) suggested that a future research priority is to explore the views of children and young people living in special guardianship and this study aims to contribute to that area.

Indeed, of the existing studies about guardianship the primary focus has been on the placement and well-being and not on the young person's school experiences

(Aldgate & McIntosh, 2006; Selwyn et al., 2014; Wade et al., 2014) and this is a limitation. As stated, all three studies refer to the young people's higher than average emotional, behavioural and communication needs but none investigated this with respect to the psychological concept of school belonging within the young person's specific educational context. In the UK, children and young people spend 190 days of the year at school and the importance of a sense of belonging to a school has been shown to impact upon many positive outcomes. There are many aspects of school and its community which have been identified to influence pupil's feelings of belonging. Gore Langton (DfE, 2017) states that time spent at school provides these children with the opportunity to 'give them a new experience of themselves, others and the world' (p. 3). This current study therefore will explore the educational experiences of children living in guardianship by gathering information from both the guardian and the young person.

The timeliness of seeking to find out about children living in guardianship at school is underpinned by recent legislation: The Children and Social Work Act (2017) has placed a duty on local authorities and schools to promote the achievement of children living in special guardianship. Designated staff members are the point of contact in each school. However, this school responsibility is relatively new and there is no existing research exploring school staff's understanding of the needs of children living in guardianship and how they can be met.

Typically, schools meet the needs of children who have experienced maltreatment and neglect by providing individual interventions based on attachment theory (Bomber, 2007; Brooks, 2019; Geddes, 2006). However, this approach focusses on the needs of the individual without taking into account the wider, often changeable home context of these children with regard to their family placements and the need to balance often complex intergenerational dynamics. This means that schools might fail to plan or provide for them adequately. This research therefore will seek to gather information from the designated staff member (DT) about how schools understand and meet the needs of these young people with regard to the pupil's sense of school belonging.

Many of these studies have used quantitative approaches which, although providing strong data about belonging, have not included a more nuanced, rich account of individual perspectives, particularly from those who have often experienced neglect, maltreatment and loss. This research intends to contribute to this area by exploring the views of children living in special guardianship using the qualitative approach of personal construct psychology (PCP; Kelly 1955a) which is one of the many approaches EPs might use to elicit the young person's voice.

This study will adopt a person centred approach which recognises that children are respected as competent beings who are capable of having insight and being experts in their own lives. Sandvik and McCormack (2018) highlight the importance of following person-centred principles through authentic, reciprocal communication with participants, which promotes a mutually respectful dialogue creating 'new knowledge and understanding' (p. 2). This is particularly important in research which might impact their lives or those of other young people. Some describe the effort of obtaining the child's voice as fundamental to EPs work with a key intention to advocate and champion the voices of the children and young people with whom they work (Farrell et al., 2006; Gore Langton, 2017; Harding & Atkinson, 2009) and an aim of co-producing knowledge with them (Philp & Brown, 2017).

2.7.1 Personal construct psychology

PCP provides both a strong theoretical framework and methodological approach for EPs in particular to accessing and understanding the beliefs of young people. Developed by George Kelly (1955a) PCP conveys that we make sense of the world by interpreting or developing constructions of it in a way which enables us to anticipate what the consequences of our actions might be. Paris and Epting (2015) suggest that our 'constructions are the 'tools' we use to move around in or 'use' reality' (p.185) and that we can never know the 'truth' but only what happens when we try things. However we construe an event will lead to consequences. If a construction leads to helpful consequences and helps us to 'move forward in the world' (p.184) then it is considered to be useful or meaningful.

Personal construct psychology can be considered as a philosophy of hope, or a psychology of possibilities, because it implies that an individual's options or ways of

understanding the world and its associated behaviour are not fixed; that with imagination and creativity individuals may be able to change their understanding (or constructions) of the world (reconstruing an event) which can potentially help them to consider an alternative understanding of an event. This is a philosophy Kelly called '*constructive alternativism*.' Ravenette (1996) suggested that 'there will always be alternatives, some of which may well not as yet exist' (p. 14). Kelly (1970) described a major challenge for us all is that our constructions of reality are limited by our imagination and we are often unaware of other possible interpretations. Kelly said

Whatever nature may be or howsoever the quest for truth will turn out in the end, the events we face today are subject to as great a variety of constructions as our wits will enable us to contrive. The most obvious occurrences of everyday life might appear utterly transformed if we were inventive enough to construe them differently.
(Kelly, 1970, p.1)

Although personal construct techniques can be used as a therapeutic intervention by practitioners to challenge children's constructs and help them to explore alternatives (Beaver, 2011; Hardman, 2001). There is not always an expectation that their constructs have to be challenged or that they need to give up old or unhelpful constructs. Personal construct methods can also be used to identify and gather a young person's constructions to gain insight into their present situation or 'worldview' (Beaver, 2011) and this is how they will be used in this research.

Generally, personal construct methods are creative and non-directive, involving a respectful dialogue between the researcher and the participant. They enable the exploration of the voice of the child in a way which is more than tokenistic and endeavors to ensure children are listened to and supported in expressing their views (Shier, 2001). Thus, for this research PCP aligns well both philosophically and methodologically.

The complex nature of those living in special guardianship together with the complexity of the concept of school belonging requires the use of a theoretical framework which can examine the richness of both. Bronfenbrenner's PPCT (1999) model offers a framework to examine the individual and contextual factors that

influence school belonging for children (Figure 2.3). It can be used to explain and discover existing and new connections between the DT and the wider socio-political context. In using this framework the intention is to avoid focussing on an internal, individual phenomenon and to present this group of children's experience of belonging as a multidimensional construct.

The aim of this research is to *develop understanding* of the educational experiences of young people living in special guardianship from their perspective, their guardian's and a relevant staff member, with a focus on a bioecological view of school belonging. Using Bronfenbrenner's bioecological framework, the research questions are:

1. How do young people living in special guardianship understand and experience school belonging?
2. How do guardians understand and experience school belonging?
3. How do designated teachers understand and experience the school belonging of children living in special guardianship?

In answering these questions, the research seeks to illuminate the views and amplify the voice of this group of children and their families by raising awareness of them and of the role schools play in their lives. It will enable others to understand and meet their needs by offering insight into how to improve their school belonging in order to promote more positive outcomes.

More broadly, this will provide educational and social services with an original, enlightened and new understanding of this vulnerable group within the context of their educational provision which will inform practice and change local policy to better meet the needs of these children and their families.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In the introduction I have presented my positionality which provides the context of this research. The literature review identifies the contribution this research intends to make. In this chapter, I will explain the research aims, questions and design. The philosophy underpinning the methodological orientation of this study will be considered, followed by the methods of recruitment, sample of participants, data collection and analysis. The ethical implications of the research will also be presented.

3.2 Research aims and questions

The research aim was to develop understanding by exploring the educational experiences of young people living in special guardianship with a focus on school belonging. At the start of the research process I developed prima facie research questions (Thomas, 2016, p. 14) based on my professional experience as a teacher and an EP, thorough reading and discussions with my research supervisors (Appendix I illustrates my early conceptual understanding of belonging). The initial questions were:

- 1: How do young people and their guardians understand and experience school belonging?
- 2: What factors do young people living in special guardianship associate with school belonging?
- 3: How do designated teachers understand school belonging with reference to special guardianship?

Although these questions were effective in guiding the research design, it was necessary to refine them for a number of reasons: firstly, because they were not precise enough in recognising the potentially distinct contribution of the three groups of participants; secondly, the focus on 'factors' in question 2 was too reductionist and

poorly aligned with the constructionist assumptions of the methodology; thirdly because the literature review and the inclusion of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT framework (1999) enabled the exploration of wider systemic issues which were not reflected in the initial *prima facie* questions.

After reflection and refinement, I arrived at the following research questions, set within the context of a *bioecological framework*:

- 1: How do young people living in special guardianship understand and experience school belonging?
- 2: How do guardians understand and experience school belonging?
- 3: How do designated teachers understand and experience the school belonging of children living in special guardianship?

3.3 Methodological orientation

The research design involved a qualitative, exploratory and multiple case study approach. It met the twofold definition of case study in terms of *scope* and *features* (Yin, 2018, p. 15): In scope, because it investigated a case 'in depth and within its real-world context' where the boundaries between it and the context were not clearly evident. In its features, because there were many unique 'variables of interest' collected from multiple sources of evidence which converged and triangulated (p.15). Yin (2018) proposes that one of the benefits of case study is the opportunity to develop *a priori* propositions to guide design (p.16). However, the exploratory nature of this study did not support this practice and instead of propositions, the interview questions were deductively developed and refined from extant studies about school belonging and delivered through individual semi structured interviews.

3.4 Study design

The study involved seven cases, each embedded three units of analysis (Yin, 2018, p. 48; Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 25): the guardian, the young person and the school's DT (Table 3.1). The context was the educational experience within which 'school belonging' was constructed. This design enabled the exploration of multiple

perspectives and experiences within each case and also the construction of themes across the cases. Triangulating three data sources per case enhanced the data's credibility and rigour of the study (Patton, 2002). Each source and case contributed to understanding and answering the research questions.

Table 3.1

Graphic Representation of the Structure of the Research Design

		<i>Individual semi structured interviews</i>		
Multiple case study Cross-case analysis	CASE 1	Guardian 1	Young person 1	DT 1
	CASE 2	Guardian 2	Young person 2	DT 2
	CASE 3	Guardian 3	Young person 3	DT 3
	CASE 4	Guardian 4	Young person 4	DT 4
	CASE 5	Guardian 5	Young person 5	DT 5
	CASE 6	Guardian 6	Young person 6	DT 6
	CASE 7	Guardian 7	Young person 7	DT 7

3.5 Ontological assumptions

Mills et al. (2006) propose that a strong research design must be congruent with the beliefs of the researcher. This research aligns to an interpretive philosophical view. It assumes that interpretivism is informed by a concept called constructivism which describes the individual engaging with objects in the world and making sense of them, (Crotty, 1998). Although it is questionable whether the interpretivist tradition necessarily involves a relativist ontological assumption (Norwich, 2019), here, the emphasis is on the ontological belief that reality is multiple – a *relativist* orientation (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988) and that there are as many realities as there are people constructing them. Knowledge is perceived by adopting a more personal and flexible research structure (Carson et al., 2001, p. 6), hence the use of PCP. From an interpretive perspective the approach is idiographic and the research task here is to try to understand how young people living in special guardianship, their guardians and DTs see, think and feel about the world.

Links between behaviour and thinking and feeling are seen as complex and uncertain rather than fixed and they are explored using subjective, qualitative methodology which focuses on understanding and interpretation (Carson et al., 2001, p. 6); resulting in a hermeneutic approach. Similar to 'a wandering traveller asking questions and entering conversations to hear others' stories' (Kvale 1996, p.4-5,) with an assumption that individuals are experts in their own experiences (Reid et al., 2005).

Methodologically, the research was viewed as a collaborative enterprise that required the participants and myself to be involved in an interactive, negotiated dialogic truth which enabled them to tell their stories, (Crabtree & Miller, 1999).

Interpretivist researchers assume that access to multiple socially constructed realities is 'only through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings and instruments' (Myers, 2008, p. 38). Knowledge is gained inductively.

Epistemologically, this research adopted a social constructionist perspective, that knowledge is socially constructed through social interaction and learning opportunities (Young & Collin, 2004) leading to the construction and communication of shared meaning (Moran, 2007).

The paradigmatic position, ontological and epistemological assumptions of the research aligned and were supported by the methods used. Further, the young people, guardians and designated teachers will have constructed their understanding of educational experiences and their perspectives about school belonging through their relationships and interactions within their social environment.

3.6 Participants

The research took place in seven schools located in the Southwest of England. The intention was to recruit between 10-12 families and schools. This relatively small number of participants was justified by the case study design which was not 'to find a portion that shows the quality of the whole' (Thomas, 2016, p. 63) but to illustrate a wide range of dimensions of interest (Arthur et al., 2012).

The inclusion criteria for this study were:

- Families living together with a SGO
- Young people on roll at a school and aged between 10-16
- Consent from guardians, young person and the school designated teacher

The rationale for including young people of this age was drawn from literature indicating that the beginning of secondary education is the most critical stage for the development of a sense of belonging because students at this stage are in transition from childhood to adolescence (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Goodenow, 1991).

Table 3.2

Case Pseudonyms and Descriptive Information

<i>Cases</i>	<i>Relationship to YP (names of interviewees)</i>	<i>Gender of YP</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Diagnoses & identified additional needs of YP</i>
Clare	Maternal grandparents (Mary and Roger)	Female	Secondary school (special)	Down Syndrome and learning needs
Alfie	Maternal grandmother (Debbie)	Male	Primary (mainstream)	Cerebral palsy, SEMH needs
Mary	Stepfather (Ben)	Female	Secondary (mainstream)	School refusal. Managed move occurred during research period
Fred	Maternal grandmother (Kerry)	Male	Secondary (mainstream)	Repeated fixed term exclusions. Managed move trialled during research period
Daisy	Maternal grandmother (Cathy)	Female	Primary (mainstream)	Attention deficit & hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), SEMH needs
Leah	Previously fostered biological father (Anne and Peter)	Female	Secondary (mainstream)	Anxiety & depression, Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC). School refusal for 18 months
Adam	Previously foster carers (Jenny and Tom)	Male	Primary (mainstream)	SEMH needs (lapsed Statement of Special Educational Needs)

The young people and guardians were allocated pseudonyms throughout the analysis and reporting to provide a degree of anonymity (Figure 3.2). DTs were referred to using only their role and were not given a pseudonym. This was done intentionally in order to reflect their role rather than personalise them within the situation. The Children and Social Work Act (2017) defines a DT as a staff member who is responsible for promoting school staff's understanding of the needs of looked-after and previously looked-after children with regard to identifying and meeting their emotional, social and psychological needs. Emphasis is placed on the DT's role in developing policy and procedures to enable this group of children, e.g. transition, accurate and appropriate information dissemination. They are also the point of contact for carers. Often the DT is a member of the school's senior leadership team and sometimes they also have the role of Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo).

3.6.1 Invitation to participate

Once ethical approval had been granted several family support workers and social workers working in the local authority's Special Guardianship Team were emailed information about the study with a request that they invite families to consider taking part. The professionals in the Special Guardianship Team (family support workers) who lead the county's monthly special guardianship drop-in sessions raised the research as an item on the agenda. They gave the information letter to guardians who showed an interest, asking the guardians to email them if they wanted to participate once they had read the letter.

Educational psychologists working in the local authority's Educational Psychology Service were also contacted and asked to pass on the information to designated teachers in schools in order to consider whether they knew of families who might want to participate. The information letter (Appendix II) invited those who were interested in finding out more to contact me directly or let the professional who had told them about the study know that they would like to know more.

The Special Guardianship Team forwarded 12 emails from guardians interested in participating. Of the 12 families initially interested, seven actually took part in the

study (see Appendix III, reasons for not participating). Five were not involved for a variety of reasons. Each expression of interest was followed up directly by email with attachments of the general information letter, the guardian and young person's consent forms. Potential participants were assured that should they agree to be interviewed we would talk through the information letter and they could give written consent then (should they wish to continue). This email was followed up with a phone call a couple of days later. Once verbal consent had been gained by the guardian over the phone, the corresponding school's DT was sent an email explaining why they had been contacted with an attached information letter and DT consent form. This email was also followed up by a phone call to discuss the research further. Should any one of the three participants in each case not give consent then none of the three interviews were carried out. In five of the cases the DT was also the SENCo. In one case the SENCo was interviewed and only when the interview had started did she say that her line manager was the DT and he wanted her to get involved because the young person was better known to her.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Ethical consent was gained from the University of Exeter's Social Sciences and International Studies (SSIS) Ethics Committee in December 2018 (Appendix IV). The British Educational Research Association (2011) and the British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics for Human Research (2010) were followed.

The research area and the vulnerable nature of the participants had a direct influence on the design of the study, data collection and analysis. The interviews with the young people were designed to be child friendly to encourage an 'engaged' and 'open' stance (Hill, 2006, p. 75). Hill (2006) suggests that key elements of children's engagement include time control, comfort with the research medium and privacy. The method and design were underpinned by these principles, e.g. the use of individual interviews, drawing activities to elicit each young person's specific words and language by which to explore their construct of school belonging.

3.7.1 Consent

At the start of each meeting the consent form (Appendices V, VI & VII) was discussed along with the details and the function of the study. Alongside written information and consent a developmentally appropriate verbal explanation of the study was given to the pupils before the interview and they were given the option to stop at any point without explanation or consequence, (Alderson & Morrow, 2004).

Transcripts from each interview were checked for any identifying features which might compromise anonymity, such as names of siblings, biological parents, etc. Both consent and information forms provided my name and contact details and include the university Data Protection Notice, explaining how the data may be used. Research data was held in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR; 2018). All data was stored securely on a password protected hard drive belonging to me. Hard copies of consent forms and transcripts were locked in a secure cabinet in my home.

3.7.2 Anonymity

In the data analysis and reporting, information was compliant with the GDPR. Despite these precautions the idiographic case study approach used in this research could threaten the anonymity of participants and so other potentially revealing identifiers were altered without changing the nature of the data itself. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities and the location of the study was changed. Despite this process some of the detail in the data may still be specific enough to indicate identity. Participants were told this in the introductory stages of the interview and assured that every effort would be made to reduce this risk. As such, a careful balance between including and withholding information was reached; one which protected the group whilst simultaneously giving them a voice.

Possible tension between the roles of EP and researcher also occurred when discussing anonymity with the participants. The research requires that the participants remain anonymous but safeguarding procedures would require that I disclose any information indicating that a young person was not safe. In order to

balance these requirements, I carefully explained that what they told me was anonymous, but I would have to share it 'if I think that you are not safe, if someone is hurting you or you are hurting someone.'

3.7.3 Safeguarding

As an EP, I hold a current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate and have Level Three Safeguarding status, which is designed for people who work around children and require a strong knowledge of safeguarding.

All interviews were carried out in the school where the child was on roll which was to encourage a focus on aspects of school life and also to give the guardians and young people an experience of being listened to within the school context. In two circumstances the interviews took place in the young person's home: one when the young person was refusing to attend school and the other when the young person had just started at a new school as part of a managed move. The Educational Psychology Service Home Visiting Safety policy was followed here.

I used my EP photographic identification during the interviews in order to reassure participants and school staff that I am familiar with schools and their safeguarding procedures. One school asked to record my DBS number. Although this might have introduced a potential for role confusion for others, the identification only has my name and picture with my DBS number, it does not state my role and so I considered it to be helpful rather than a hindrance.

3.7.4 Approach to the interviews

My study involved pupils who may experience additional educational needs; a group considered at 'more than minimal risk of psychological harm' (BPS Code of Human Research Ethics, 2010). To mitigate the risk of harm and minimise the possibility of sensitive topics being raised or psychological stress occurring the interviews were person-centred (Sandvik & McCormack, 2018) and semi-structured. For example, if the participants became upset, they were given the opportunity to stop or take a

break from the interview. Sensitive and appropriately empathic responses were given during all interviews.

As an EP I am constantly aware of the power differentials present between myself and other adults and the young people in schools which can manifest in compliant behaviour (Gallagher et al., 2010). I endeavoured to reduce this and develop a rapport by using problem free talk (Ratner et al., 2012, p. 190) before discussing the research and by showing a willingness to actively listen to other aspects of their life if they chose to raise them. I let the participant set the pace of the interview whilst gently refocussing them back to the activities when required. If the young people asked me specific questions about my role I chose to answer them minimally, ensuring that the information was not too personal, for example one child asked me 'do you live with your mum or dad?' and I told him that I live with my children and my cat.

In the spirit of participatory research adults were sent their transcripts, by encrypted email, to give them the opportunity to amend their scripts or to comment further. All participants could contact me to withdraw up until the date given in the encrypted email. Following this date agreement of the transcript was assumed.

Ideally the young people would have been sent a digital or hard copy of their transcripts, however I decided that this would not be in their best interests due to their limited opportunity to keep them privately stored.

3.7.5 Reflexivity

In my work a high level of reflection is required in order to be more open to my own 'blind spot bias' (Scopelliti et al., 2015). This level of reflection is particularly required when working with children (Punch, 2002). To ensure that I reflected on the research process I met with my University research supervisors each month, I kept a reflexive diary and I also included 'reflection on research' on the monthly agenda with my work supervisor. The latter is a private meeting where all information is confidential and anonymous and provides support for my own well-being in accordance with the British Psychological Society's Division of Educational and Child Psychology (DECP)

published *Guidelines for Supervision of Educational Psychologists* (Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010). This level of support was required because I found some of the participant's narratives to be particularly harrowing and this time and space provided further support).

3.8 Data collection

From January 2019 to September 2019, single, individual semi-structured interviews were carried out face-to-face using similar but different approaches with adults and young people. These will be detailed below. The potentially sensitive nature of the research required a quiet and private space and individual interview rather than considering a focus group design. The chosen interview methods intended to convey to the participants that, in this situation, they were the 'experts' and that I was the inquirer.

3.8.1 Interviews with the guardians and designated teachers

The structure of the adult interviews was influenced by the hierarchical focussed interview technique (Tomlinson, 1989) which incorporates sufficient structure to address specific topics, while remaining versatile enough to probe particular issues (Galletta, 2013). This is a top down but flexible approach where a question at the highest level of generality was used first and then more information was sought from the emerging responses. At this point, my construal of school belonging was drawn from existing literature (Tomlinson, 1989) which determined superordinate and subordinate areas for the adult interviews. I trialed the interview process on a colleague/parent who suggested that the final question be added in order to allow 'anything else' to be mentioned, for example, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender (Table 3.3). A hierarchical structure of superordinate and subordinate concepts was used without completely following a predetermined agenda or narrowing the focus of the interview so sharply that the participants could not raise new ideas and concepts (Tomlinson, 1989).

If the interviewees did not spontaneously raise the superordinate topics, then they were asked directly about them. In the first few interviews I used a prompt sheet to

remind myself of the super- and subordinate areas (Tomlinson, 1989) and noted which aspects of the schedule had been covered. However, as I became more familiar with the interview schedule the sheet was not required and the interviews were more fluid.

The super- and subordinate areas of the interview were the same for guardians and teachers with slight changes to the wording. Both were asked different contextual questions, for example, guardians were asked how their child had come to live with them and teachers were asked how long they had been in their role.

Generally, a neutral, non-judgmental stance was used with active listening skills (Fitzgerald & Leudar, 2010). Prompts and probes such as reflecting, clarification, justification and using empathic responses, such as, 'What makes you say that?', 'Can you tell me a bit more?', 'That must have been difficult...'(Gillham, 2000, p. 46) were used throughout to extend the narrative.

Table 3.3

The Guardian's and DT's Interview Schedule with Super/Subordinate Areas and School Belonging Research

Superordinate areas guiding questions	Subordinate areas	Supporting evidence
Belonging Probably means different things to different people, what do you think belonging means?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there anything about your child that you think affects the way they feel they belong? • If someone belongs how do you think they feel? What do you think helps your child feel like they belong in this school? 	An overview of school belonging discussing the key variables associated with it as a psychological concept (Slaten, et al., 2016; Wastell & Degotardi, 2017; Goodenow & Grady, 1993a)
Transitions When things change how do you think that	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary to secondary school, between schools, between year groups? • When things change for your child like class 	During times of transition student's sense of belonging decreases which can lead to an increase in depressive

affects your child's sense of school belonging?	teachers, schools, how do you think that effects their sense of school belonging?	symptoms, (Newman et al., 2007), which impacts on school belonging (McMahon et al., 2008)
Relationships Who do you think helps your child belong in this school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do they do? • How do you know? • Friends, teachers, other adults? 	The consistent presence of an emotional connection provides the framework for the significance of each of the superordinate areas (Bauminster & Leary, 1995; Selwyn et al., 2014; Sugden, 2013; McNeely & Falci, 2004). Students perceived safety and effective management of bullying is positively associated with school belonging (Cunningham, 2007; Hallinan, 2008)
Activities and curriculum What sort of activities/things does the school do to help your child feel like they belong?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What makes them feel like they belong here? • Activities in and out of school time, place, learning, curriculum, acceptance, shared interests, belongings? 	Curriculum is an important factor in school connectedness and belonging (Loukas et al., 2010; Rahman, 2013). Availability of recreational spaces, opportunities to play and socialise and school size (Anderson et al., 2004). Sense of belonging is enhanced when teachers promote adaptive academic and interpersonal contexts in the classroom (Anderman, 2003).
Physical environment Are there any objects or things that help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A place where you can make choices (agency)? What places help them feel like they belong in this school? 	School location and size is a predictor of school belonging (Anderman, 2002; McNeely & Falci, 2004; Lee & Smith, 1995),

your child feel like they belong in this school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there anything about the school organisation or building itself or its location which affects their feelings of school belonging? 	as is the organisation (Shochet et al., 2006).
Now the last thing I want to ask: Is there something else you haven't mentioned that might affect your child's feeling of belonging?		

3.8.2 Interviews with the young people

In a similar way to the adult interviews, the young person's interviews were carried out using techniques based on personal construct psychology (PCP) techniques built on a credulous, accepting approach (Kelly, 1955a). Kelly (1955a & b) emphasised the personal nature of meaning making postulating that no one has direct access to the truth; each of us develops a subjective sense of ourselves and others. Kelly viewed research as 'a cooperative enterprise in which the participant joins the psychologist in making an enquiry' (Denicolo et al., 2016, p.132) establishing a 'democratic' relationship between the researcher and participants (Burr et al., 2014).

Kelly's PCP theory draws on Dewey's pragmatic ideas, that the world is always *'unfolding before us in some never before seen aspect because these particular events have never happened before'* (Paris & Epting, 2015, p. 184). Paris and Epting (2015) explain that at the centre of Kelly's formulations is the idea that people interpret or 'construe' the world and that these construals have consequences: the measure of the construals is how well they help us to move forward and *be* in the world in a meaningful, helpful or useful way (p. 184). The central theme of PCP is that each person *construes* or sees the world through their own particular construct or viewpoint. A construct is a basic unit of analysis and the means by which we access the world (Butler & Green, 2007, p. 6). Core constructs are those constructs by which we maintain our identity (superordinate constructs) while peripheral constructs are 'those which can be altered without serious modification' (Kelly, 1955a p.356). Thus each individual brings to bare their own unique sense of the world.

PCP techniques enable the exploration of experiences from the individual's point of view with minimum researcher bias (Fransella & Neimeyer, 2003). The researcher

endeavours to elicit the voice of the participant by the researcher attempting ‘to stand in others’ shoes, to see their world as they see it, and to understand their situation and concerns’ (Fransella et al., 2004).

3.8.3 Belonging and not belonging

Ravenette (1980) used the PCP technique of drawing a concept or thing and its opposite to explore how children make sense of their world. He considered that a child’s drawing of themselves in context might point to aspects of knowing which exist at lower levels of awareness than they might be able to access verbally. In the interviews with the young people, I used drawing the concept of belonging and not belonging to elicit, explore and reveal the tacit knowledge and subjective meaning of their concept of school belonging. Wastell and Degotardi (2017) identified that children aged as young as 3 years old are capable of conceptualising and expressing complex cognitive concepts like belonging which supports my use of this technique. I use PCP techniques almost every week with children of all ages, however I had never used them to explicitly elicit views on belonging, so I trialed the activities (see Trial section below).

Drawing a concept and its opposite is one of a number of tasks in the Ideal Self activity (Moran, 2001) where children are first asked to draw the person they do *not* want to be. In this study, the young people were first asked to draw a time when they felt they belonged because the intention of the task was different to the Ideal Self activity and aimed to specifically explore the young people’s concept of belonging.

3.8.4 Approach to the young person’s interviews

To reduce stressful feelings about the activities the children were told that the drawing did not have to be their best, it could include stick people. In the introduction to each interview the children were told that they did not have to write anything and that when I wrote things down it would only be things that they had said (without interpretation). They could see and check what I wrote.

Moran (2001) explains the importance of 'going with the flow' and of being curious rather than surprised or judgemental. Throughout the interviews the pace was set by the child and flowed freely. I sat next to or at right angles to the young person which encouraged turn taking and any drawing and writing was shared openly between us.

The interviews were carried out in a single session in a quiet, private setting (Moran, 2001). They were designed to reduce the requirement to write or read but the PCP techniques relied heavily on expressive language and the audio recording required clarity of speech. If I was concerned about whether the audio had picked up what a young person had said I repeated them neutrally and non-judgementally, which meant that I could check that I understood their meaning and record what had been said.

Recording the interview also meant that complete attention could be given to responding to the child and only the responses at the end needed to be written down. Hughes (2004) describes four relational responses of playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy and these were used throughout the young people's interviews to establish and develop a trusting relationship and to help the children to feel relaxed and comfortable.

3.8.5 Trial

Trialing the activities with two familiar children aged 16 and 11 helped me to hone my approach. I asked the 16-year-old to 'draw a picture of belonging/not belonging'. This instruction was too simple and required further explanation. Thus, I altered the instruction to be more concrete and specific.

The trial also helped me to identify the best questioning techniques to use to explore the constructs identified in these interviews. I initially used laddering techniques (Hinke, 1965 in Fransella, 2003), because these questions explored the young people's core beliefs, their values and assumptions about the world (Burnham, 2008, p. 36). This did not yield information about the young person's view of school belonging. The complementary technique to laddering is pyramiding (Landfield, 1971, in Fransella, 2003), which can be used to explore how the young person perceived the situation and to elicit subordinate constructs. This method explores a

more behavioural and practical aspect of the constructs elicited. So using pyramiding techniques and directly linking them to a strong sense of school belonging resulted in more useful research data regarding the core and peripheral constructs. Burnham, (2008, p. 40) suggests that pyramiding explores a young person's 'working definition' of a concept. Pyramiding questions generate rich and in-depth information and focus on inferential aspects to the constructs, e.g. what might a person like that be doing, feeling, thinking? Pyramid questioning reaches a natural stopping point when the young person feels they have little else to add to their answers.

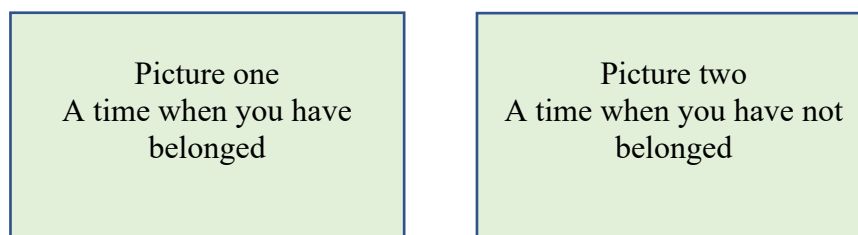
3.8.6 Activity

Each young person was asked to 'draw a picture of a time when you felt like you have belonged' and 'draw a picture of a time when you felt like you have not belonged'. Maxwell (2006) describes this process as developing a 'polarity' of thinking, leading to a greater understanding of the child's thoughts, interests and concerns.

If a young person seemed reluctant to start drawing they were told that the picture did not have to be of a 'real' time but perhaps a time they would like to have happened. It did not have to be of a time at school (Figure 3.4). This initial drawing intentionally focussed on the broad concept of belonging before focussing more sharply on school belonging.

Figure 3.4

Graphic Representation of Picture Placement - 'a time when you felt like you have belonged' and 'a time when you felt like you have not belonged'

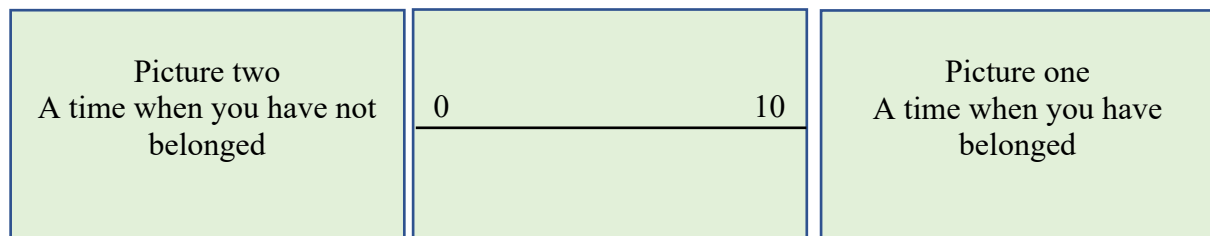


Whilst the young person was drawing the two pictures, they were asked clarification questions and verbal and non-verbal prompts were given when necessary to help to maintain their focus. What are you drawing? What is happening in this picture? Can you explain the picture? Who are you drawing? Where is that? When was that?

Both picture one and picture two were placed on either side of a third sheet of paper. Freehand I drew a horizontal line with '0' and '10' at either end (Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5

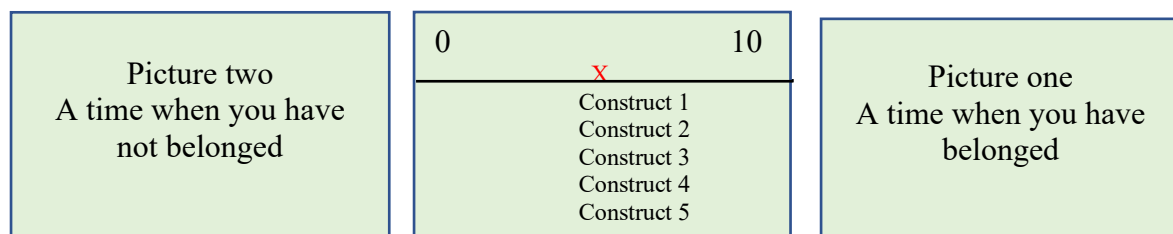
Graphic Representation of Placement of Pictures One and Two with a Third Sheet of Paper with a Scale from 0-10



The young person was given a pen and asked to mark where they felt they belonged at this school on this line. If the child was unsure (several were moving school imminently) the question was repeated and clarification of which school was given 'so at the school you are in now?' Once they had marked the line they were asked 'what made them feel like a 'insert number?'' The young person began to tell me what factors led them to feel like they belonged at the number they had marked on the line. These are subjective factors that they associate with school belonging and in PCP these are the emergent poles of a construct. The language the young people used was not altered and I wrote down key words from what they said on the middle sheet of paper underneath their mark on the line, telling them 'I am writing down what you are telling me' (Figure 3.6). Throughout this process I used the same clarification and elaboration I had used in the adult interviews.

Figure 3.6

Graphic Representation of Placement of Pictures One and Two with the 0-10 Scale and Constructs

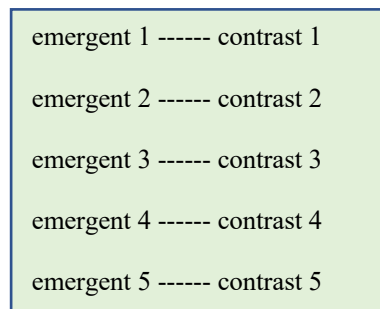


This activity elicited interrelated constructs and elements. Pope and Keen (1981 p. 36) explain that constructs do not exist in isolation but in a coherent and hierarchical manner. Kelly noted the importance of eliciting more than one construct. After completing this activity, on a fourth blank sheet of paper I wrote down each of the key words spoken by the young person and checked with them 'so you think you belong at this school as a 'number' because of these things?' I read each aloud as I wrote them down on one side of the new sheet of paper (Figure 3.7). I used the children's own language and they were given the opportunity to change these words if they wanted (Salmon, 1988).

These served as the emergent poles of the school belonging constructs. Bipolar constructs of the emerging and contrasting poles were generated by asking the young person a variety of questions such as 'What would you call it when it is not...?'

Figure 3.7

Graphic Representation of Emergent and Contrasting Poles Presented to Young Person



It was important not to ask them to tell me the 'opposite' of the emerging poles because I did not want them to tell me the linguistic opposite, for example friends and not having friends, although this naturally occurred sometimes (Figure 3.7). The paper was placed on the table in front of us. I drew a line between each of the bipolar constructs (the emerging and contrasting poles) and asked the young person which they felt like/they were most of the time. Some chose to rate themselves using the Salmon Line (Salmon, 1988) in a similar way to the initial task and some simply pointed to one end or the other. After they had chosen which they were most of the time I began asking pyramid questions. For example, if the young person said and chose 'feels supported' as how they were most of the time then I might ask them: How can you tell when someone feels supported? What is happening in school if

someone feels supported? What would I see if someone feels supported? What would I see if I looked in at your class? How would someone feel like they belong if they feel supported? What does someone who 'feels supported' feel? Who would notice if someone 'feels supported'? These questions generated a wealth of data from the young people which was analysed together with the guardian's and DT's data.

3.9 Data analysis

Thematic analysis (TA; Braun & Clarke, 2013) was used to analyse all of the interview data. Described as a method for identifying, analysing and reporting on themes within data. Its flexibility aligns with many epistemological perspectives including social constructionism. This approach suggests that the researcher's role in knowledge production is central (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.6).

All interviews were audio recorded and took between 35-75 minutes. I transcribed the audio data within a week of each interview using a Microsoft Word document. As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 164) each transcript was checked and edited for identifiable information, mistakes and punctuation. This was a rigorous process which included recording non-verbal utterances and behaviours such as '(crying)' and '...' for pauses. Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 162) describe a transcript as the 'product of an interaction between the recording and the transcriber' and by checking the transcripts this improved their accuracy and helped me to immerse myself in the data. Smith et al. (2009) propose that transcription is part of the analytical process.

A complete coding approach was used; anything that may have some relevance to the research questions was coded (Braun & Clarke, 2013 p. 206). An initial trial of NVivo with a first transcript led me to focus on the explicit meaning or precise words and phraseology used and this was not helpful in identifying any broader meaning or intention behind the words (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 219). I decided to hand code each transcript. However, hand coding one transcript was extremely time consuming and created so many codes which, despite using different colours to highlight the comments, were difficult to distinguish from each other due to the font size and

layout. I returned to NVivo after a short period of training to code systematically. This enabled the integration of codes within and/or across cases with heightened focus on analysis of the implicit meaning within the data. Using NVivo each transcript was systematically coded by identifying words, phrases and chunks of narrative which potentially addressed the aims and research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 210; Charmaz, 2006), (Appendix VIII). In each case, of the three sets of codes (young person, guardian/s, DT), I coded the young person's data first to reduce the influence of the adults' data on the codes of the young people. Codes were reviewed and combined to generate themes around a central organising concept (p. 226). Braun and Clarke (2013) call these the 'candidate' themes, which can be revised against the original dataset to check whether they captured its 'meaning and spirit' (p. 234). Each case produced a code book (Appendix IX). Using the coded excerpts and the code book a 'thematic map' was created for each case, (Appendix X), which led to better defined and more accurately named themes.

After each interview 'noticings' were recorded in a research diary to help with the process of data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). These were not part of the systematic analysis but served as aids and triggers for later analysis (p. 205).

3.10 Quality in qualitative research

'The essence of qualitative research is to make sense of and recognize patterns among words in order to build up a meaningful picture without compromising its richness and dimensionality' (Leung, 2015). A challenge in qualitative research is to ensure that there is a high level of rigour with strong justification of the methods adopted. Rigour is essential if the findings of this research are to be used to raise awareness and amplify the voice of this vulnerable group of young people and their guardians which in turn will enable social and educational services to understand and meet their needs with regard to strengthening school belonging. However, there is currently no clear consensus about the standards against which qualitative research should be judged (Noble & Smith, 2015). The tests and measures of generalisability, validity and reliability used in quantitative research are not applicable. Consequently many authors have proposed various criteria for consideration when evaluating the integrity of the qualitative study; credibility,

transferability, dependability, confirmability (Guba, 1981), truth value, consistency, neutrality and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). More recently, Connelly (2016) and Noble and Smith (2015) examine trustworthiness and credibility of findings. Noble and Smith (2015) describe several strategies which promote them. Using their ideas the quality of the research design was considered:

- Careful consideration and reflection upon my positionality was maintained throughout the study.
- To support my reflexivity a diary was kept, regular supervision was held as well as professional discussion with colleagues throughout the process.
- Meticulous records were kept to demonstrate decision making.
- The unit of case study included three data sources to support triangulation of data and a more comprehensive set of findings.
- The process of data collection and analysis has been transparent and thorough which has led to robust coding and subsequent interpretation.
- Sufficient detail and a well-researched context have been provided so that readers are able to determine how similar the research environment is to other situations (transferability, Guba, 1981).
- The description of methodology and methods used is clear and transparent (dependability, Guba, 1981)
- Consistent with social constructionism (the joint construction of meaning) two colleagues moderated my analysis by coding anonymised sections of transcripts and discussing some of my coding. Themes were discussed in detail at supervision sessions.

The following section of the thesis is the analysis. Each of the seven cases is presented as a case study in its own individual chapter including a detailed, reflexive, ideographic analysis of the themes generated from the data. Chapters will be presented in the order that an expression of interest was first obtained from the guardian. A cross-case analysis follows the case study chapters which will explore the similarities and differences between the cases using Bronfenbrenner's PPCT framework (1999). Finally, the discussion chapter will focus on the study's research questions.

Chapter 4: Clare

Data from three semi-structured interviews contribute to this case: Clare's, her guardian's (Mary and Roger) and the DT's. Mary and Roger are Clare's maternal grandparents. Each interview took place in Clare's school. Clare's speech and language development meant that it was often necessary for me to sensitively repeat what she said which served to check my understanding and to support the accuracy of the audio recording. The case will be presented by describing Clare's school and family context and mapping it onto Bronfenbrenner's PPCT framework (1999), (Figures 4.1 & 4.2) before considering the overarching and subthemes generated from the data (Figure 4.3).

4.1 School context

Clare has a diagnosis of Down syndrome and associated learning needs. She had a Statement of Special Educational Needs issued before pre-school which has been transferred to an EHCP. She attended one mainstream, primary school from nursery to the end of Year 6 and received a high level of support '*the highest you can have*' (Mary) from one full-time teaching assistant until the end of Year 5 when a different adult was asked to support her. At the end of Year 6, Clare transitioned to a specialist secondary school designated for pupils with moderate learning needs. Clare is in Year 10. Her adapted curriculum includes core subjects and life skills along with time spent at the local college and hospital.

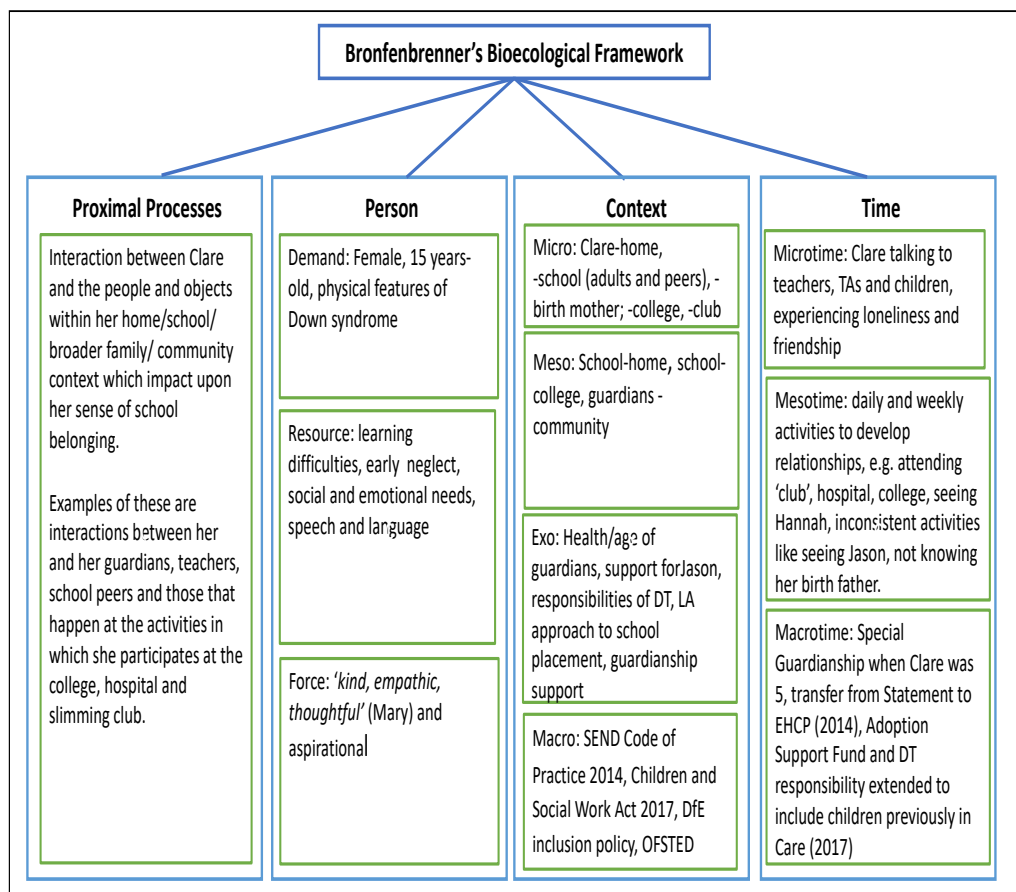
4.2 Clare's family

At birth, Clare lived with her mother, Hannah, and her half-brother, Jason. Clare has not met her biological father; she does not know who he is. Before and following Clare's birth, Hannah was addicted to heroin and she relied heavily on Mary and Roger (step-father) to provide care for her and the children. As such, Mary and Roger have always been part of the children's lives; Mary '*cut Clare's cord* (Mary).' Mary explained that the children experienced high levels of neglect from birth and at a meeting with '*social services*' she was told '*if you don't take these children then*

they'll be adopted and you won't see them' (Mary). Clare and Jason were officially placed with Mary and Roger at the ages of 3 and 5 years-old respectively. Mary inquired about a SGO because she 'wanted to be the one who had the final word' (Mary). It took approximately 18 months to be agreed. Throughout this time Hannah sometimes saw the children at Mary and Roger's house but when the SGO was agreed she chose to stop seeing the children for between 12-18 months (the children were aged 8 and 10 years-old).

Figure 4.1

Bronfenbrenner's PPCT Framework (1999) with Elements of Clare's Life



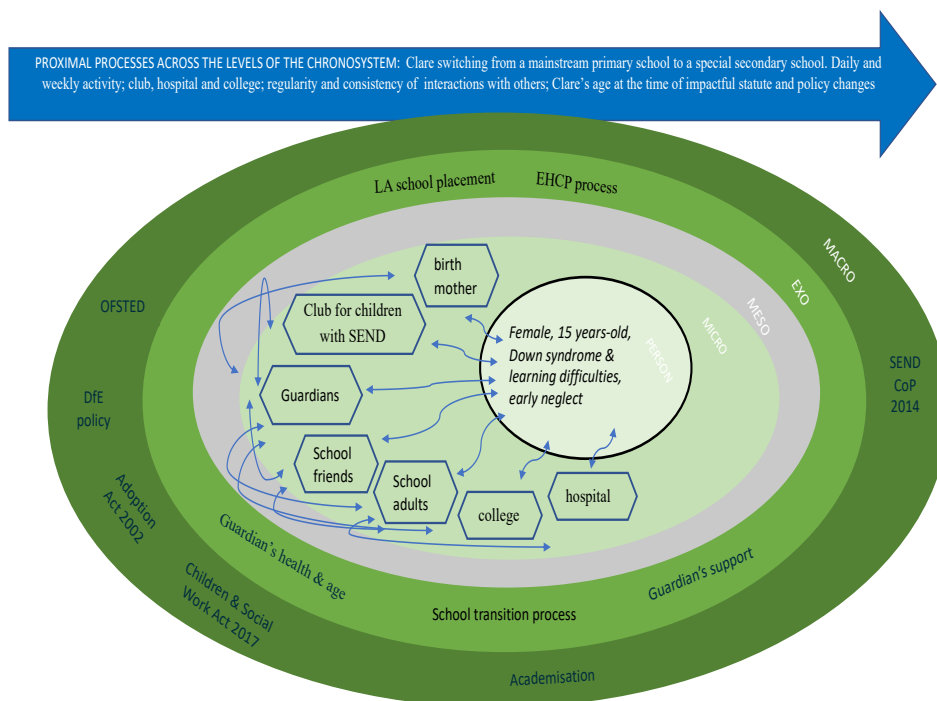
Until the age of 5-years-old, Jason had irregular contact with his father, who was then incarcerated and died following an assault. Jason was permanently excluded from a mainstream primary school at the age of 7-years-old and placed in a boarding school for children with behaviour, emotional and social difficulties (BESD; SEN Code of Practice, 2001). At 12-years-old he was placed in another boarding school

and was subsequently permanently excluded from it. Jason is now 17 years old and is NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

Currently, Clare lives with Mary and Roger (nanny and granddad) and has frequent and consistent weekly contact with her birth mother, Hannah (who she calls 'mum') and her 5 year-old half-sister, Sally. She sees Jason irregularly.

Figure 4.2

Graphic Representation of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT Framework (1999) Mapping Relevant Elements of Clare's Life.



4.3 Themes

The overarching themes generated from the data were *protection and autonomy* and *relationships and connection*. Each of these themes are constructed from subthemes (Figure 4.3).

4.3.1 Protection and autonomy

An overarching theme of school belonging generated from the data is *protection and autonomy*. When asked to define belonging both Clare and the DT highlighted safety as a feature of belonging in general.

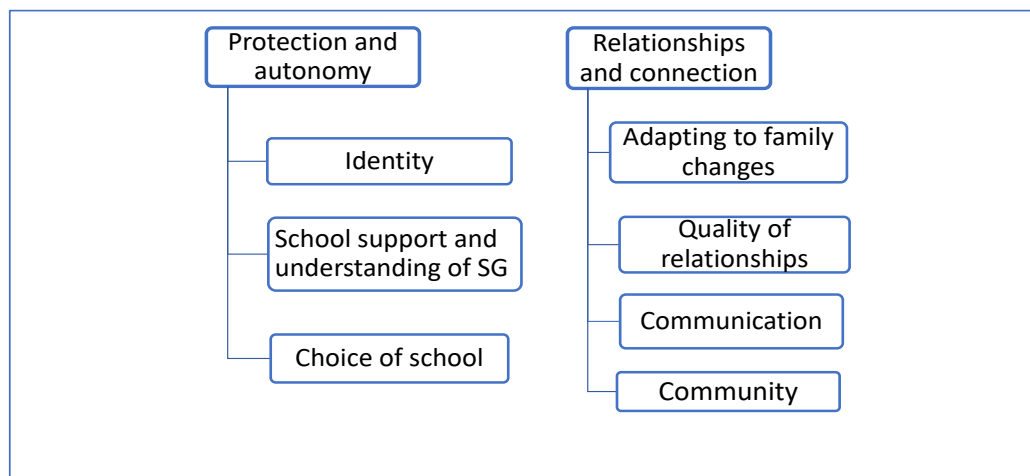
'people that belong to me are safe. It feels happy, good. Different places I'm safe at. I'm safe with my family, at school, at (club for children with SEND). Yes.' (Clare)

'they have a place that they feel safe, they have friends, adults they can talk to who will listen, they feel like they fit in here.' (DT)

Protection and autonomy developed from the subthemes of: *identity, choice of school, school support and understanding of SG.*

Figure 4.3

Table of Clare's Overarching and Subthemes Generated from the Case Data



4.3.2 Identity (person)

Clare's person characteristics comprise unique demand, resource and force factors which interact with the environment through proximal processes. Each of these can

be related to the subtheme of *identity* which sits within the overarching theme of *protection and autonomy*.

Clare's salient demand characteristics include being female, 15, with physical features often associated with Down syndrome. Mary's narrative suggests that the physical and cognitive features of Down syndrome have been a protective factor against the impact of Clare's early life experiences.

Me: Was it a difficult early start?

Mary: No, I don't think so for Clare because of her disabilities, because of being Down syndrome I suppose, I don't know'. I don't think that Clare had that awareness and I think that when there was neglect when they were with their mum Jason shielded her a bit from it. He's got all the memories and I don't know that Clare does.'

'It (Down syndrome) has almost made it easier because you can see the need.'
(Mary)

Contrary to Mary's perceived protective factor of Down syndrome there is also a risk that it overshadows or hides any additional needs which might be associated with Clare's experience of neglect in her early years.

Clare's resource characteristics seem to have an impact on her feelings of school belonging. For example, her physical health needs include: her persistent breathing difficulties which have led to her being bullied on the bus to school; her '*bad hips*' which have stopped her from visiting her primary school (which she misses) and her weight gain. Indeed, Clare raised her physical appearance as something she seeks help with from adults in school, '*Sometimes I see them and talk about my body image. Not in class.*' Clare specified that she would not talk about this in class which resonates with the second overarching theme of *relationship and connection*. To manage Clare's weight Mary goes with her to a weekly community slimming club.

Clare's force characteristics include her learning difficulties which relate to the theme of *choice of school*. The school provides an adapted curriculum with proximal

processes which focuses on Clare's development of her problem-solving skills, self-regulation, learning to generalise new knowledge and maintaining relationships with others. The school curriculum also connects to the theme of *community* as it includes a vocational programme of weekly attendance at the local hospital and college. This has motivated Clare towards working in a hospital when she leaves school '*I want to show people that I can do it. Prove it. Try to get everyone better...they have to train me. I want to be a doctor.*'

Clare's aspirations are high in relation to her learning difficulties and perhaps this serves as an example of the staff *protecting* her feelings rather than planning a realistic future with her, supporting her to understand that her life will be different and perhaps not as independent as she expects. The DT did not describe a specific approach geared towards supporting children with Down syndrome or those who had experienced neglect but one which linked to generic adolescent need, one of '*thinking of things in the moment. We help them to build their confidence and self-esteem*', (DT).

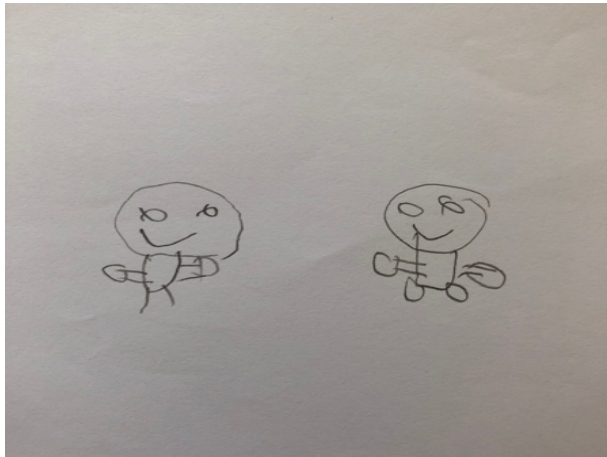
4.3.3 School support and understanding of special guardianship (microsystems of Clare-home and Clare-school)

A second subtheme which falls within *protection and autonomy* is *understanding of SGO and school support*. When Clare was asked to draw a picture of 'belonging' she drew a picture of two characters, '*that's me and my teacher assistant (TA)*', (Figure 4.4). She described the picture and identified receiving help as an important element, '*I get different support people. They help me do a lot of things.*'

Clare has always received a very high level of support because of her learning needs. '*It wasn't ever classed as full time but it was the highest you can have,*' (Mary). Although Clare clearly identified her relationship with the TA as a contributory factor to school belonging, the responses of Mary and the DT indicate that they place less importance on a key relationship.

Figure 4.4

Belonging - 'me and my teaching assistant'



For example, Mary expressed ambivalence recognising that although the adult support helped Clare to manage the demands of a mainstream primary school it could sometimes interfere with her parenting of Clare and Clare's development.

'It was really a little bit too close I think that relationship. At times it was like the TA wanted to do things her way, such as periods and things like that when it was me, it is my child so it's down to me,' (Mary).

After being with Clare for several years, at the end of Year 5, the teaching assistant was moved. Mary commented that this helped Clare to develop her independence in readiness to transition to the special school. Thus indicating Mary's priority for Clare to develop her autonomy and prepare for secondary school over maintaining her relationship with the TA.

'Having a different person...it was different dynamics and she was told to stop being 1:1, not to be so much just for Clare but to let Clare know she was there for the classroom to try and make Clare more independent to come into High School and it worked really well,' (Mary).

The DT described special guardianship accurately and spoke about the limited resources and support available to guardianship families in comparison to adoptive families. She spoke about the process of getting guardianship and how traumatising it might be for the child.

'For adoption families there are quite a lot of resources for them to pull from so although they might not have named social workers or funds there are adoption charities they can go to for support and there does not seem to be that same level of

support for families who have special guardianship. A lot of the time the way they have come about has been quite traumatising for the child and I can think of a few occasions when that has happened and it's a big responsibility for the person who has taken on that guardianship... And there doesn't seem to be any support for them around that,' (DT).

Despite the DT's acknowledgement of how difficult things can be for guardianship families and her recognition of '*attachment problems*' she added that the complex needs of the children in the school makes it difficult to identify and meet these needs. Adding that the school does not do anything differently for families living guardianship than they would for any of the families with children in that school.

'It's difficult, all of our children here have complex needs so it's difficult to separate which bit is which... what is trauma and what is a learning need?' (DT)

Me: How do you maintain links with home for SGO?

DT: Don't think we do anything differently unless there was a need to do anything differently...we ring if we're worried about the children...parent contact is quite good.'

4.3.4 Choice of school (mesosystem)

Mary's responses indicate that she wanted Clare to go to a school which could provide high enough learning expectations for her to make progress and develop her autonomy whilst also providing the required level of pastoral care and protection that she considers Clare to need.

'It was really worrying choosing a high school because it had been so good there (primary school) and I went around to mainstream high schools and came here but to me you walk in and you get the feeling and that's what I got here,' (Mary).

'Clare is capable of being pushed to learn which is what I wanted for her and you come here and they can still get that pastoral support and they are in small classes and it is adapted for their needs,' (Mary).

The special school is described by the DT and Mary as *protective* and this seems to be an important factor for them in helping the children belong there.

'in a bubble...protected,' (Mary).

'They are in a sort of bubble here; they are very protected...they have a place that they feel safe, they have friends, adults they can talk to who will listen, they feel like they fit in here,' (DT).

The proximal process of school choice is reflected in Mary's account of a phone call with a local authority caseworker *'Look I don't mean to be rude but I know this child better than any of you and I don't think she'll grow there (a school for children with profound multiple learning difficulties) at all' and then I got the letter and I thought 'yes',* (Mary).

Although Mary's account of the process reflects some agency in *school choice*, Clare's reflects less and when asked to explain why she feels she belongs to the school Clare said that it was because others chose it for her.

Clare: Because teachers chose me to come here

Me: Did you choose to come here?

Clare: I can't explain it, my nan chose it for me because I can't really say it because I get speechless.

The local authority's process of allocating secondary school provision to children with additional needs is located in Clare's exo and macrosystems (both systems with powerful influence). For example, one process which has elements in both the exo and macrosystem is the EHCP which aims to identify pupils' needs and specify provision to meet them (SEND CoP, 2014). The DT raised concerns about the limited information about each child within their EHCP, *'the EHCP rarely goes into detail about their background from my experience,'* (DT) suggesting that the responsibility for identifying and meeting Clare's needs falls to the school. The DT indicated that the school gains an understanding of pupils' needs through an *'in-depth transition'* process with primary school staff and families.

4.3.5 Relationships and connection

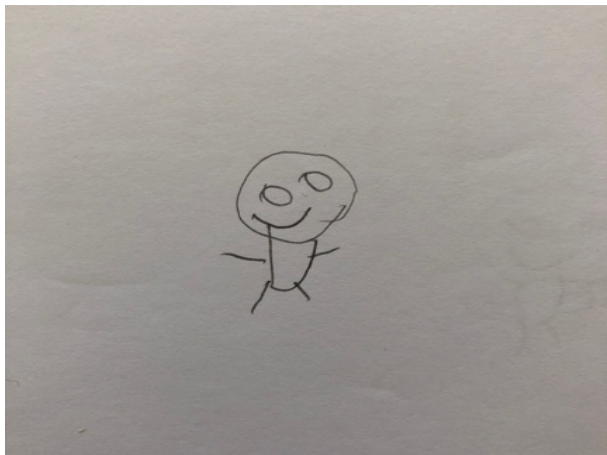
The second overarching theme is *relationships and connection*. It consists of the subthemes *adapting to family changes, quality of relationships, communication and community*.

4.3.6 Adapting to family changes (microsystem Clare-home)

The microsystem Clare was born into was predominantly unstable and neglectful which is likely to have undermined her emotional and social development. Roger described belonging as *'having a loving family around you, who care about you'* and both guardians spoke positively about the stability of all family members.

Figure 4.5

Not Belonging - 'my brother'



However, Clare's 'not belonging' picture was of Jason, a single figure. This picture and her associated narrative suggests that this is a challenging relationship for Clare and, although he provided a protective influence in her first three years, he is now associated with 'not belonging'.

'That's my brother. He's a bit rude to me. 'Cos he's quite, I don't understand what he says about but I occasionally see him, he's not my family...I know I have to protect myself. He's not nice, says mean things, I can't explain it. It's hard to tell, he was kind when I was little. My brother swears and it's not suitable and it's not tolerant for me,' (Clare).

Indeed, as well as the impact of Clare's early relational experiences on her school belonging, aspects of Clare's current family dynamic and structure **may** present a further obstacle, which is in contrast to Mary's perception of family stability. Despite

the interview's focus on the school context Clare's family featured repeatedly in her interview including her worry about her care in the future,

Clare: I can't say it to you because it will make you sad but if my nan and grandad passed away I'd have to stay with my mum or auntie or uncle

Me: Do you worry about that every day?

Clare: No but I have it in my head. I ignore it. I just try to think time has to move on. I have to move on too. My great grandad passed away from cancer. I can't really cope on my own because I'm too young.

4.3.7 Quality of relationships (proximal processes within the microsystems)

Within the pupil-school microsystem the DT explained that the relationships are positive because teachers have received training in how to support children who have not experienced a well-attuned relationship with a primary carer.

'All the TAs and teachers know the children very well. All the teachers are PACE (playful, acceptance, curiosity, empathy) trained. Most of our TAs too,' (DT).

The school has a high pupil: staff ratio and Clare said that the teachers help her to feel happy. However, this does not guarantee that Clare has developed a strong relationship with a particular key adult. Indeed, Clare could not name a specific adult.

Me: What helps you to feel a bit happy?

Clare: My teachers

Me: Other children?

Clare: No. Just teachers. They're the same and I can't really say. All the teachers.

As well as the limited connection with teachers, Mary and Roger indicate that Clare has not developed strong friendships in school either which has led to her feeling lonely at times.

'The only thing I would say is the year group that joined when Clare did, the girls have been very different to Clare and she has never had a close female friend.'

(Mary)

When asked about friendships Clare said, *'I can't remember friends but I had a lot of friends in my old school and in (club for children with SEND).'* Clare spoke nostalgically about her primary school,

Clare: I used to do it (karate) at my old school.

Me: Did you like your old school?

Clare: Yes. I miss it.

Me: Who would you like to see there?

Clare: My teacher, my other people, my PE teacher and new people there.

The DT recognised how difficult it can be for children who attend a special school not transitioning into the same secondary schools as their primary school peers. *'They see their peers that they were in school with go to the local high school and stay friends and then they don't so I think it impacts upon them'* (DT). In addition, there are often no *'close community friendships'* because the school might not be located near the child's home. To develop *connection* to the *community* the school organises activities *'so for the last couple of weeks they've been in the Apple shop in town, they have been up to Tesco's and she (Clare) goes to college once per week'* (Mary).

To enable Clare's friendships, Mary has taken Clare to the local club since she was 5 years-old and describes it as a place Clare belongs although she acknowledges that the same people do not attend each week. *'She's gone to (club) since she was 5 so in terms of belonging she really does belong'* and *'She loves going and she meets and greets everyone there'* (Mary). Clare's responses support Mary's observation that Clare has friends in the club but adds that she does not know their names,

Me: Have you got friends there?

Clare: Yes. I can't really remember their names yet.'

Thus Clare's feelings of school belonging have been affected both by her losing her previous friendships and not having developed close relationships in her secondary school.

Clare: I want someone there for me but it's not really there yet'

Me: So you have friends?

Clare: But I don't really see them. Sometimes I'm a bit lonely in myself. But I'm fine 'cos my cousin stays with me...but in a different class. I see her but sometimes she wants her own time. I know her name. She's younger than me'.

Here, the theme of *choice of school* relates to quality of relationship because although the special school may offer Clare a *protected* space it introduces additional challenges in terms of the small numbers of children on roll and their moderate learning difficulties and associated social development. For example, Mary and Roger described the difficulties Clare has experienced on the transport to school, with one of her peers who noticed her loud breathing.

'There is something wrong with her breathing and it's like she is snoring and (other girl) said that in the van and that upset her. Clare does feel these things,' (Roger).

The DT also identified the limited number of children and their additional *communication* and learning needs as problematic. She explained that the school runs clubs and activities to encourage friendships and will *'do friendship or girls groups if we notice that there is a need'* (DT). However, the approach of responding to needs as they arise suggests a limited understanding of Clare's needs with regard to her experiences of early neglect and her worries about her future raised in the theme of *adapting to family changes*.

4.3.8 Communication (person characteristics and mesosystem)

Communication is a significant subtheme within *relationship and connection* because it refers to the proximal processes within and between microsystems; it presents as both a person characteristic and a mesosystemic feature. Clare's speech and language difficulties are a person characteristic which impacts upon her

understanding and ability to express herself. As a mesosystemic feature the communication theme relates to the interaction between Clare's microsystems and relates to the theme of *quality of relationships*.

Clare is aware of the difficulties others have, particularly teachers, in understanding what she says and this has an impact on her relationships with them. She indicates that her communication skills are a factor in the *quality of relationships* she has with others,

Me: So, it helps you feel like you belong because they understand what you are saying?

Clare: Yes. And a lot of teachers can't because I'm different at speaking. Well, sometimes they understand but not really, occasionally.'

Me: And will they ask you to repeat things when they don't understand?

Clare: No. I find it difficult to talk sometimes.

The DT also raised communication as a factor for pupils in developing and maintaining relationships '*because all of the children have social and communication problems friendships are really difficult*' (DT).

4.4 Conclusion

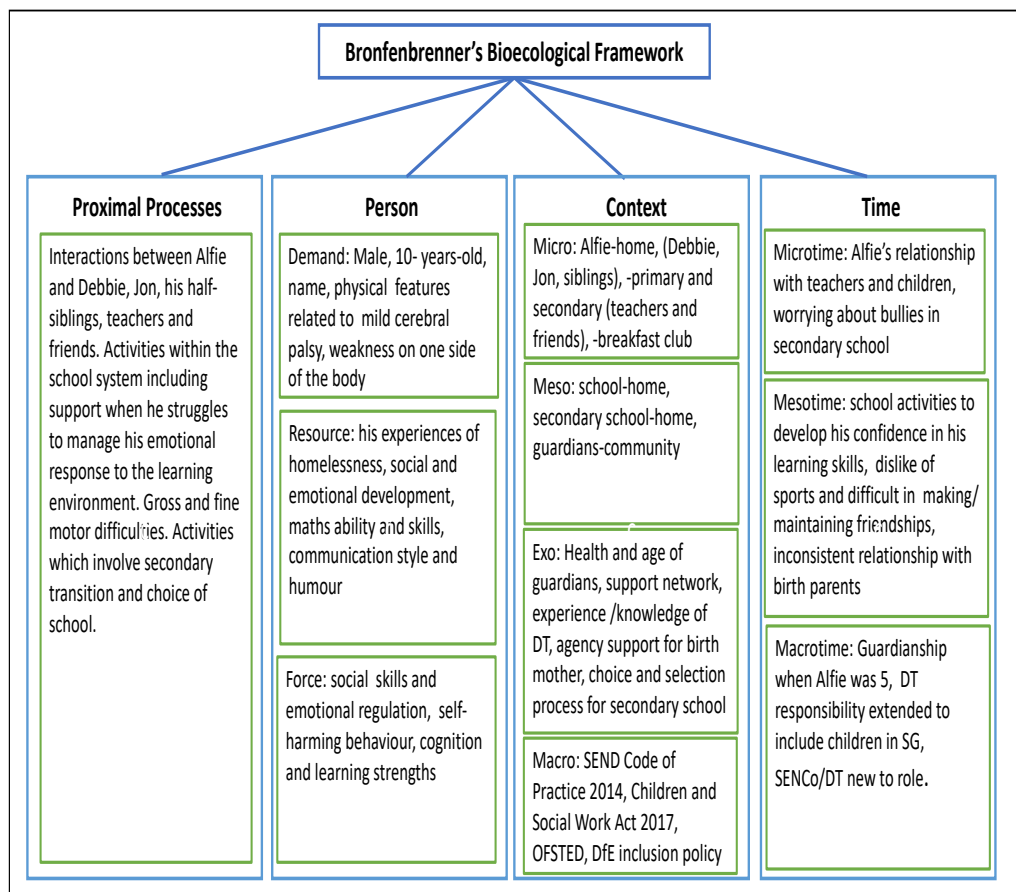
Clare's person characteristics feature as a strong influence in her school belonging because they have an impact on how she has been supported throughout her educational life and the choice of school. The DT exhibits a good understanding of factors which effect families with a SGO, however Clare's specific needs associated with her early life experiences seem not to have been particularly well identified or met. Clare feels isolated and cannot name a friend or a teacher to whom she feels close and she worries about her future in relation to her guardian's health. However, communication (mesosystem) between the microsystems of home and school is frequent and consistent which is a mitigating factor to Clare's school belonging. The wider community links through the school's vocational curriculum and the extra-curricular activities also serve to strengthen Clare's school belonging.

Chapter 5: Alfie

Data from three semi-structured interviews contribute to this case: Alfie's, his guardian, Debbie's (Alfie's maternal grandmother) and the DT's. Each interview took place in Alfie's primary school. The case will be presented by describing Alfie's school and family contexts and mapping them onto Bronfenbrenner's PPCT framework (1999), (Figures 5.1 & 5.2) before considering the overarching and subthemes generated from the data (Figure 5.5).

Figure 5.1

Bronfenbrenner's PPCT Framework (1999) with Elements of Alfie's Life



5.1 School context

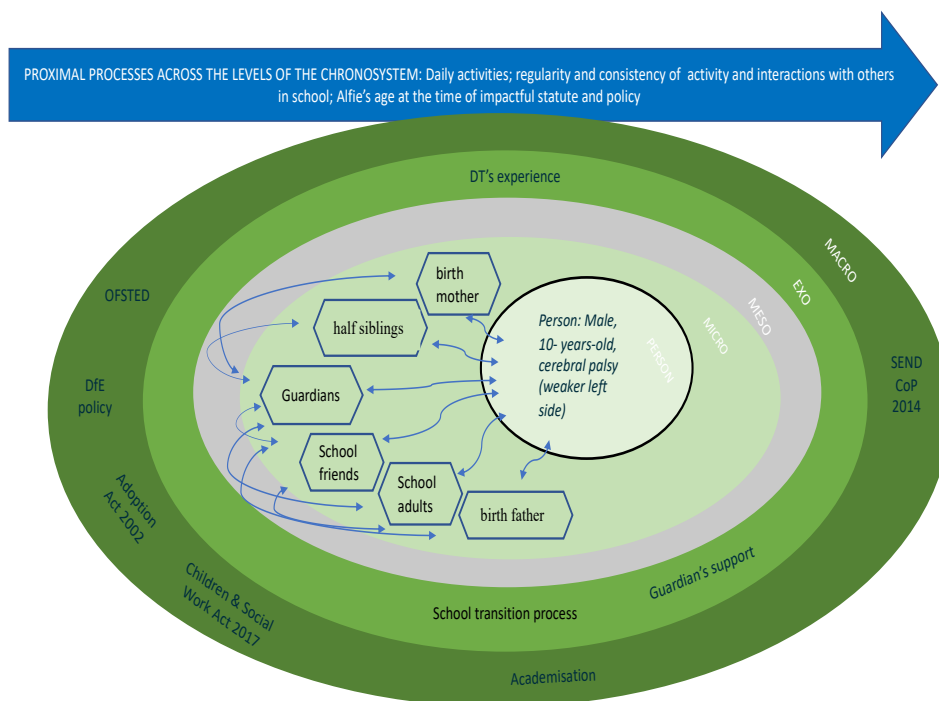
Alfie is 10-years-old and has attended one mainstream primary school. He is in Year 6. He has mild cerebral palsy but no additional learning needs. In a few months Alfie

will be transitioning to Year 7. He is unsure whether he is going to go to the local comprehensive school or to the selective grammar school (which is an hour away on the bus). He is on the reserve list for the grammar school as a result of taking the 11 plus exam.

Alfie’s primary school is relatively small, with approximately 100 pupils, and is located at the centre of a small town. Alfie’s birth mother chose the school because she was moving from place to place when he reached school-age and she had to find a school that was on a bus route. The DT described the school as having ‘*high pupil premium and high children in need.*’

Figure 5.2

Graphic Representation of Bronfenbrenner’s PPCT Framework (1999) Mapping Elements of Alfie’s Life.



5.2

Alfie’s family

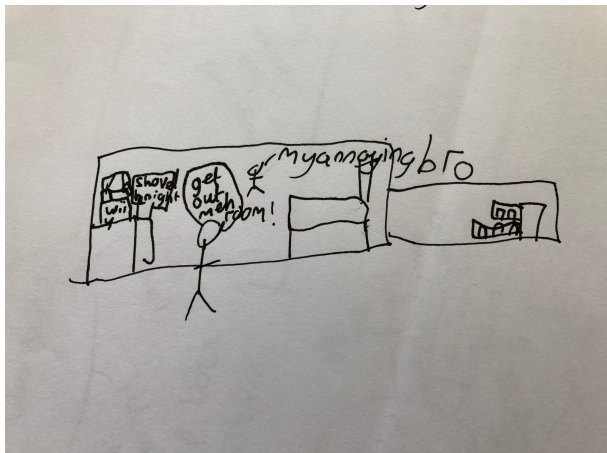
At birth Alfie lived with his mum. When he was four-years-old his younger brother, Charlie, was born and then a year later his sister, Daisy. Debbie has had care of

Alfie and his siblings 'on and off' since their birth because her daughter was often homeless 'and there were lots of different boyfriends,' (Debbie). Debbie spoke of Alfie's mother's experiences of ongoing mental health difficulties and attempted suicide when she was in her last trimester of her pregnancy with Alfie. Debbie understands that this event is associated with Alfie's physical development and his cerebral palsy. Alfie's diagnosis of cerebral palsy impacts mildly upon his gross and fine motor skills.

At 5 years-old Alfie and his two younger half-siblings started living with Debbie full-time. His mother remained homeless 'for a long-time' and Debbie explained that this had an impact on Alfie for a while, 'he always worried about where she was staying but she is local now'. Alfie sees his birth mother 'occasionally' although Debbie described this as 'quite disruptive'.

Figure 5.3

Belonging – 'my bedroom'

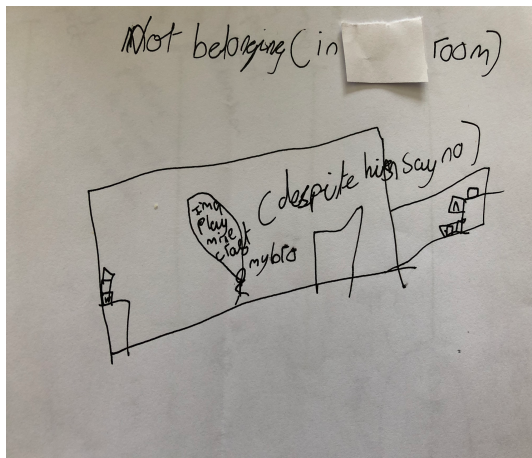


Alfie lives with Debbie, his step-grandfather (Jon) Charlie and Daisy, who are now 6 and 5 years-old respectively. In both of Alfie's pictures, 'belonging' (Figure 5.3) and 'not belonging' (Figure 5.4) he drew his bedroom. He said that he has 'belonged there for ages'.

However, Alfie's 'not belonging' picture included Charlie. Alfie spoke disparagingly about his brother and wondered aloud whether Charlie could live with his dad in prison instead of in the house with him. Debbie described Alfie as having a 'love/hate relationship' with his siblings and said that this has been explored through therapy.

Figure 5.4

Not Belonging – with Charlie



Alfie met his biological father when he was 4 years-old, following a 'DNA test which proved he was the dad,' (Debbie). From then on Alfie saw him at the weekends until his dad went to prison 'for quite some time,' (Debbie). Alfie had not wanted to maintain contact with his dad, 'but then quite recently he's asked if he can go and see him,' (Debbie).

5.3 Themes

The overarching themes generated from the data are *individuality and association* and *school processes and features*. Each of these themes are constructed from a number of subthemes (Figure 5.5).

5.3.1 Individuality and association

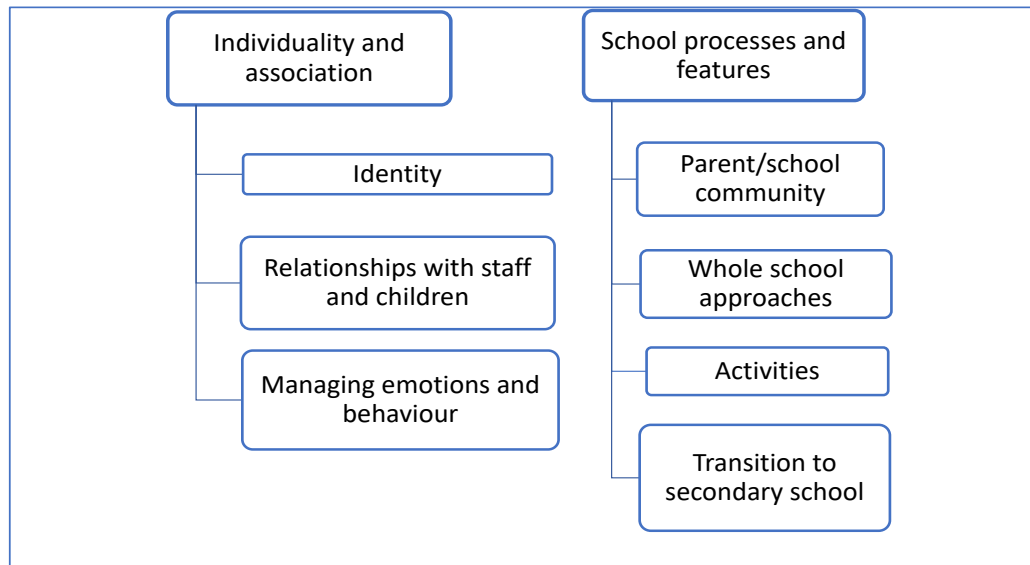
An overarching theme is *individuality and association*. Three subthemes were identified as features of school belonging: *identity, relationships with staff and children* and *managing emotions and behaviour*.

5.3.2 Identity (person)

Alfie's person characteristics comprise unique demand, resource and force factors which can be related to the subtheme of *identity*.

Figure 5.5

Table of Alfie's Overarching and Subthemes Generated from the Case Data



An important resource factor influencing Alfie's school belonging, is his knowledge of his early life experiences and its impact on his identity. Alfie did not mention this himself but Debbie spoke about Alfie showing confusion about his name, a fundamental factor of identity and belonging. Alfie has a double-barrelled surname that has changed over time. His surname is different between contexts and this seems to introduce self-doubt about his identity and confusion regarding his association with an adult in school. One of his names is the same as a teacher in his school and Alfie asked Debbie recently if he is that teacher's son.

Debbie: We were in a doctor's surgery and his name before was Alfie Smith-Jones which is what is on his birth certificate and that's what he is at the doctor's surgery but he's actually Alfie Lane-Smith so he heard that and he said, 'am I Mrs Jones,' that's his teacher's name, am I her son?'

Me: How old was he?

Debbie: This was the other day...he was quite sincere when he said it...and I said, 'Is that what you think Alfie?' You could see he was confused and then he didn't want to talk about it. So the name thing has been a massive thing...He said, 'but why was I called Jones?'

Adding to Alfie's confusion about his identity is his understanding of the origin of his 'knowledge,' or cognitive ability. Instead of considering that school has helped him to develop his learning skills which in turn has helped him to make connections and problem solve, his responses reflect a belief that people *have* or are given knowledge and that his has been inherited or come from an external source.

Alfie: Like me. I don't know where I got my knowledge from because my nan didn't give birth to me and I didn't get it from my mum.

Me: So, if you didn't get it from them...

Alfie: probably from You Tube (laughs).

Along with the resource characteristic of above-average cognitive ability, Alfie combines humour (force factor) to help him to relate to others. It also serves to shield him from having to explore and process challenging emotions. His use of humour can be seen in the contribution above and below, when Alfie was asked to define belonging and he attempted a dictionary definition and used humour at the end.

Me: Can you tell me what belonging means?

Alfie: The action of having a place to belong or possess the ownership of something. If you feel like you belong you are happy, happy, happy. Synonyms for happy, thrilled. There are bullies in every school but not in this one. Bullies don't get enough hugs. My miming is on point... oh no I broke the first rule of miming (laughs).

Despite his use of humour, Debbie views Alfie's social communication skills as an obstacle to his peer relationships, and expresses concern about this,

'He'll talk for hours about it (gaming) and the other children are finished 'thank you very much I want to go off now,' but he still wants to talk to them about it,' (Debbie).

He's never said he feels like an outsider but when I watch him, it's like he is either overbearing and he'll go in and push his way in, or he'll stand on the side-lines,' (Debbie).

Another person characteristic (demand factor) is Alfie's cerebral palsy which manifests as a physical weakness on one side of his body. This is not always immediately apparent to others but it has had an impact upon his fine and gross motor skill development which has affected his motivation towards particular activities; he dislikes PE tasks and is more confident in classroom-based activities. His motivation and interest in the latter presents as a protective factor to his feelings of school belonging, *'being called a 'nerd' is a complement,'* (Alfie). Debbie shared the same narrative,

Me: What do you think it is that makes him feel different?

Debbie: Well he said to me, 'they will call me a geek and I don't mind; I just say thank you for the compliment.'

The above excerpt identifies Alfie's thinking skills and knowledge as something which helps him to relate to other children. Paradoxically, this cognitive strength of making connections to make sense of the world, might also serve as a risk to his feelings of belonging as it compels him to ask searching questions underpinned by his identity confusion.

The importance of Alfie's cognitive ability as a factor of his school belonging is relevant to his choice of secondary school. Debbie explained that she has applied to both the local comprehensive, which has a focus on sport and PE, and the more distant grammar school, which has better overall achievement data. Below she expressed uncertainty about which would better meet Alfie's needs.

'I think that because they (local school) are focussed on sports and because we drive past the school every day and they're always out doing sports and Alfie just doesn't like sports. We've been to the grammar school and they are very focused on learning over the sport and that's what Alfie wants, the learning, he doesn't want the physical activities,' (Debbie).

This relates to the second overarching theme of *school proximity and features* and the subtheme of *transition* which will be presented later in the chapter.

5.3.3 Relationships with staff and children (micro and mesosystemic features)

The second subtheme within the overarching theme of *individuality and association* is *relationship with staff and children*. Alfie identified a very high level of belonging at his primary school and rated it '10' (the highest). Alfie explained that 'everyone's nice here,' and when asked how a person feels in a school where everyone's nice Alfie said, 'it would make them want to belong'. However, Alfie's comments about his feelings of school belonging are incongruent with Debbie's. Whilst she accepts that there are adults with whom he has developed a strong relationship over time, which has strengthened his feeling of belonging, she harbours concerns that Alfie's sense of school belonging is diminished because of his over reliance on adults and his low quality, unenduring peer relationships.

'I do feel that even though he doesn't say that he doesn't feel like he belongs little snippets of things tell you that he doesn't, and it worries me because I want him to be happy and I want him to be involved with people, not lots of people. I know that's not going to be Alfie but I just want him to feel like he is important to other children, not just to adults because that's where he is at the moment, it's all adults, it's not children, and he's only 10, he needs children in his life that aren't his brother and sister,' (Debbie).

5.3.4 Managing emotions and behaviour (person, micro and mesosystems, proximal processes)

The microsystem Alfie was born into was inconsistent and unreliable which may have affected his social and emotional development. Indeed, all interviewees commented on Alfie's emotional and behavioural responses to others. Below, Alfie hints at his strong emotional and behavioural response to this situation but, once again, presents his cognitive ability as a protective element; maths helps him to cope and accept feelings of being left alone.

Me: How might someone who belongs at '10' behave at school?

Alfie: Outside they are playing with others. If they were on their own they would be an emotional wreck.

Me: Is that what happens when you are on your own?

Alfie: No, but you might as well be one if you're playing by yourself. Some people are like me and curl up in a ball. It happens when I don't have anyone to play with. I just find somewhere to sit and accept the fact that I have nothing to do.

Me: hmmm, though you said that your sense of belonging is 10 here so what happens in those times?

Alfie: I think about maths, hard maths. I am at a point where I am really good at hard maths but I'm bad at the easy ones.

Debbie is concerned about Alfie's difficulty in regulating his emotions and behavioural response within both adult and peer relationships. He can exhibit unsafe responses,

Debbie: Alfie will go off and he will scratch himself and say he's going to kill himself and go through what he is going to do, he's going to knife himself.

Me: So, he talks about self-harm?

Debbie: Yes, all the time. Something happened to him at breakfast club the other day, he was talking too much, and the lady, he was quite disruptive, so the teacher said to him to calm down and she made him go and sit outside and that was it. He would scratch himself, cry, sometimes scream at the top of his voice but more often than not it is scratching.

Debbie's comments about Alfie's emotional response and behaviour relate to his comments about his start in secondary school in a few months. He raised bullying as one of his main concerns, but accepted that a protective factor is his trust in staff to keep him safe. Below he uses humour, perhaps to mask his emotions.

Alfie: I can see why they don't have fountain pens in school though

Me: Why?

Alfie: Because you have the bullies. Sharp point.

Me: Are there always bullies in secondary school?

Alfie: You always have that rare bully...and by rare bully I mean hella common! (laughs) But there are teachers to go to.

The DT's construct of school belonging involves feeling safe enough to express a wide range of emotions,

'So belonging for me is feeling safe and secure in your environment, being able to provide them (pupils) with the ability to express their emotions at different times and feel safe to do that,' (DT).

Debbie defined belonging as *'feeling comfortable and at ease where you are, happy in your surroundings'*. Hence, for Debbie school belonging occurs when one is happy where they are. Her perception of Alfie is that he is not happy where he is and therefore experiences low levels of school belonging.

The contrast between the DT's and Debbie's comments suggest that the DT's construct links to her professional role to create an environment where children can express how they feel, within a cohesive *parent/school community*. For the time being, this features as a protective factor of Alfie's school belonging. However, it might not be sustained in the *transition* to secondary school, where staff there might hold different beliefs and might support Alfie differently. This point is explored further in the second overarching theme of *school processes and features*.

5.3.5 School processes and features

5.3.6 Parent/school community (micro and exosystemic features, proximal processes)

The school Alfie currently attends is relatively small, with approximately 100 pupils. The DT was previously a class teacher there so despite spending '6 weeks' in role, she has a relatively broad understanding of the organisational issues which might impact upon guardianship families within the school and its community, than she might have in a larger school where roles are perhaps more delineated.

The DT explained that the pupils in the school come from many different types of family and the school has adapted accordingly. For example, the flexible use of a story, *'one girl, who lives in guardianship, we were reading the Stick Man and she*

was adamant that stick man and his lady love are grandparents not parents,' (DT); and language, 'we would never say 'mum and dad', we always say adults, we're very good about that,' (DT).

Debbie supported the DT's comments about the different family types within the school community,

'Surprisingly, there are a lot of children in the same position, living with grandparents, and so when I come to pick Alfie up there are probably as many nannies picking their children up as parents,' (Debbie).

The DT mentioned school activities which promote a strong sense of community and communication between staff and parents/guardians, *'communication with adults is very strong here,' (DT), and 'it was our biggest OFSTED thing, the parents, 100% the parents were really supportive,' (DT).* Indeed, the DT relies upon the strong school/home communication to identify and meet the needs of the families, expecting to find out what she needs to know about specific vulnerable groups through general communication methods, rather than targeting vulnerable or harder-to-reach families.

Me: Could there be children living in guardianship but you don't know?

DT: No.

ME: How do you know that?

DT: Because of the relationship with the parents. That's the only reason.

5.3.7 Whole school approaches (exosystemic and proximal processes)

The DT spoke about 'being inclusive' and that although there is nothing explicitly focussed on developing children's sense of belonging,

Me: Is there anything specific to include or to focus on the belonging of children?

DT: I can't think of anything specific, an inclusive school, quality first teaching but I can't think of anything specific.

Along with communicating with the families, the DT also relies upon whole school approaches and classroom practice to help children to feel that they belong to the school community, *'Every week we have an assembly on tolerance and British values, that kind of thing,'* (DT).

'We have a lot of amazing adults here, they're really good at that (helping children to express their emotions) so we do provide a lot of time and space,' (DT).

The DT described several interventions including play therapy, Thrive, counsellors, forest school and an *'inclusion hub'* to provide nurturing resources for those children who require it. She explained that the school responds to each child's identified need as it presents, rather than anticipating particular needs based on a child's possible vulnerability, such as known early neglect. The DT's description of the activities offered by the school focus primarily on helping children to understand and manage the emotional aspects of the learning environment, arguably, they do not aim directly at developing social skills to promote friendships. Thus, the generalised approach to providing an inclusive environment and strengthening the community links perhaps fails to meet Debbie's hope for Alfie to develop stronger friendships.

5.3.8 Activities (proximal processes and person characteristics)

The DT explained that the school offers a wide variety of activities aimed at promoting physical and mental health of the children and the wider school community,

'We take care of health as well, so we are very proud with sports and that kind of thing...we do community sports of the year...we do a daily mile and lots of mental health work, so we have a mental health hub and we try and encourage parents and carers to come in,' (DT).

Although these activities are a school priority and resonate with the *parent/school community* and *relationships with staff and children* subthemes, Debbie's comments about Alfie's difficulty in developing friendships, suggest that this general approach to building a school community does not meet Alfie's needs, presenting a threat to

his school belonging. As a response, Debbie is seeking help beyond the school community,

'I'm going to start taking him to a club on a Tuesday, I haven't told him yet...It's for children that have all types of difficulties, learning and what have you. I was going to take him there and see how he fits in, because there's computers there and although I don't want him to be on the computers, I think that might draw him in and then he might build a relationship with somebody... but trying to get him into the group is difficult because sometimes he just won't even walk in through the door,' (Debbie).

5.3.9 Transition to secondary school (meso and micro system, proximal processes)

Alfie's comments about feeling '10' in terms of school belonging support the DT's perception that the school offers adapted provision within an inclusive ethos. However, as previously stated, there may be a risk to Alfie's school belonging as he moves from the 'safe' (DT) primary school environment to a secondary school.

Me: Tell me what you think will make him happy?

Debbie: I think if he feels that people are listening to him because Alfie will not seek people out to begin with. He'll need to get to know his surroundings

The DT spoke about doing 'lots of workshop afternoons for Years 4 and 5' with the secondary school staff. There are transition meetings between the secondary school SENCo and the guardians, and extra sessions at the secondary school. The DT said that Alfie is on the 'scheduled list' to attend a 'different club there each Wednesday.' Although this enhanced transition might be seen to encourage a stronger sense of belonging, the comments here relate to those in the subtheme of *activities*, particularly with regard to Debbie's comments, 'but trying to get him into the group is difficult because sometimes he just won't even walk in through the door,'

Further risks to Alfie's sense of school belonging arise because he is unsure which secondary school he is going to. As well as applying for the local secondary school he is on the reserve list for the grammar school, which is approximately an hour

away. Therefore, he may not know which school he is going to go to until late in the summer holidays,

I think his mind is very undecided and he's not settled and he's not focussed on where he's going because he still thinks he might go to a different school than what he's been told he's going to. Alfie has been told he's going to the local school but because of what happened to his friend where she was told last minute that she was going to the grammar school I think he thinks that's going to happen to him, (Debbie).

5.4 Conclusion

Alfie's case reflects the importance of identity on his feelings of school belonging. Specifically, his early life experiences, his name, and his perception of his unique strengths and weaknesses in relation to others'. Alfie's emotional and behavioural responses influence his relationships with peers and adults but he is relatively protected within the primary school context, because of its size, location and school community. Both Debbie and Alfie seem to recognise that the transition to secondary school presents a risk to Alfie's sense of belonging, specifically his peer relationships.

Chapter 6: Mary

Data from three semi-structured interviews contribute to this case: Mary's, her guardian Ben's (Mary's step-father) and the DT's. The interviews took place over a three month-period because Mary was in the process of a managed move. A managed move is a trial transfer from one school to another. The process requires children to remain on roll at their secondary school whilst trialling a new school. It is a voluntary agreement between senior leaders of both schools, carers and the pupil, and it is most often used by secondary schools to move pupils close to permanent exclusion. However, in this case, Ben had requested a managed move from Mary's local secondary school (LSS) to a new school (NS) approximately one hour away, because Mary was unhappy about her peer relationships at the LSS.

Ben's interview was first and carried out in the LSS before Mary had started the NS. The DT worked at the LSS and her interview was carried out, whilst Mary was still on roll there but attending the NS. Mary's interview was the last of the three and took place in her's and Ben's home after she had attended the NS for 6 weeks. Thus Ben and Mary's interviews were dominated by comparison between the two schools and the process of transition, whilst the DT's was more reflexive about what had happened and what could be done differently in future.

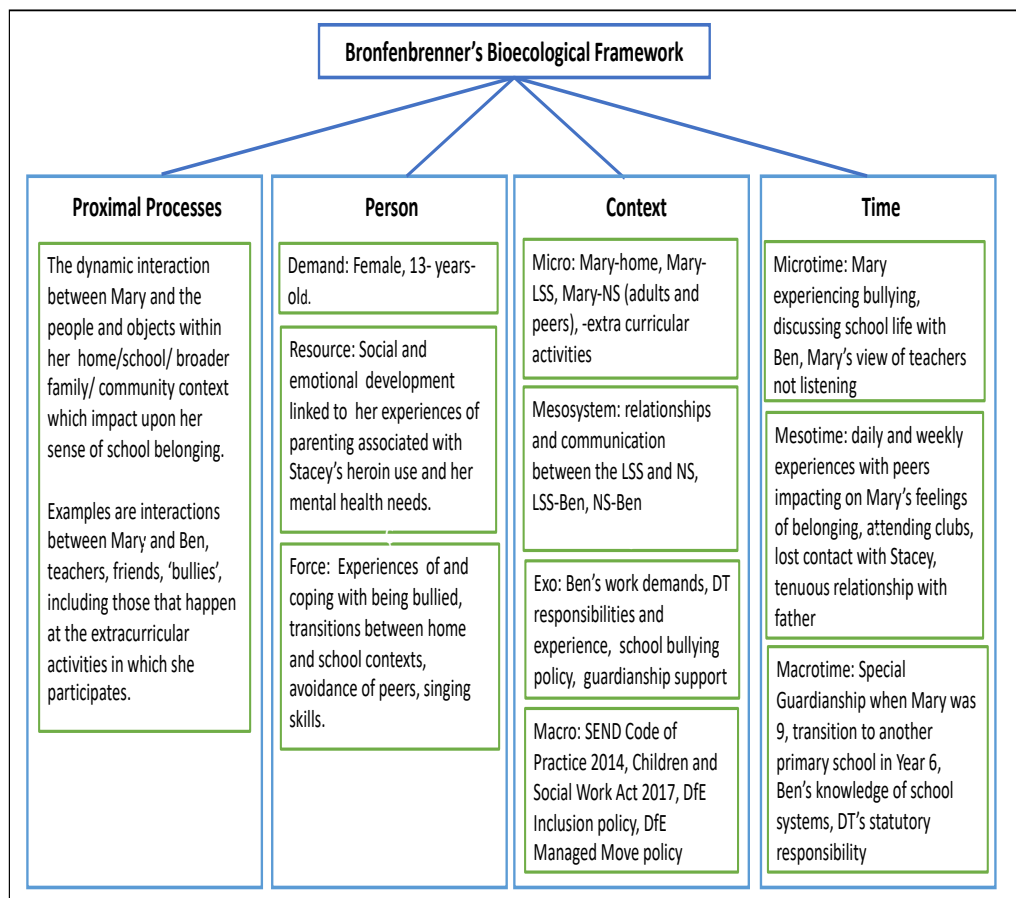
The case will be presented by describing Mary's school and family contexts and mapping them onto Bronfenbrenner's PPCT framework (1999), (Figures 6.1 & 6.2) before considering the overarching and subthemes generated from the data (Figure 6.5).

6.1 School context

Mary is currently in Year 8. Unsatisfactory peer interaction was associated with her low attendance and in the 3 or 4 weeks prior to my interview with Ben, she had not been to school at all. When interviewed, after she had been attending her new school for several weeks, Mary rated her sense of school belonging in the previous LSS as '4' and in her NS as '9'.

Figure 6.1

Bronfenbrenner's PPCT Framework (1999) with Elements of Mary's Life.



Mary attended two primary schools; the first from Foundation Stage until mid-way through Year 6 and the second for the last few months of Year 6. She moved because she went to live with Ben. Ben spoke positively about both of Mary's primary school experiences; she '*absolutely loved*' the first primary school and of the second he said that Mary '*loved it there even though she was being bullied,*' because '*there were a couple of teachers who were absolutely amazing.*' He moved Mary from the first primary school to one closer to their home.

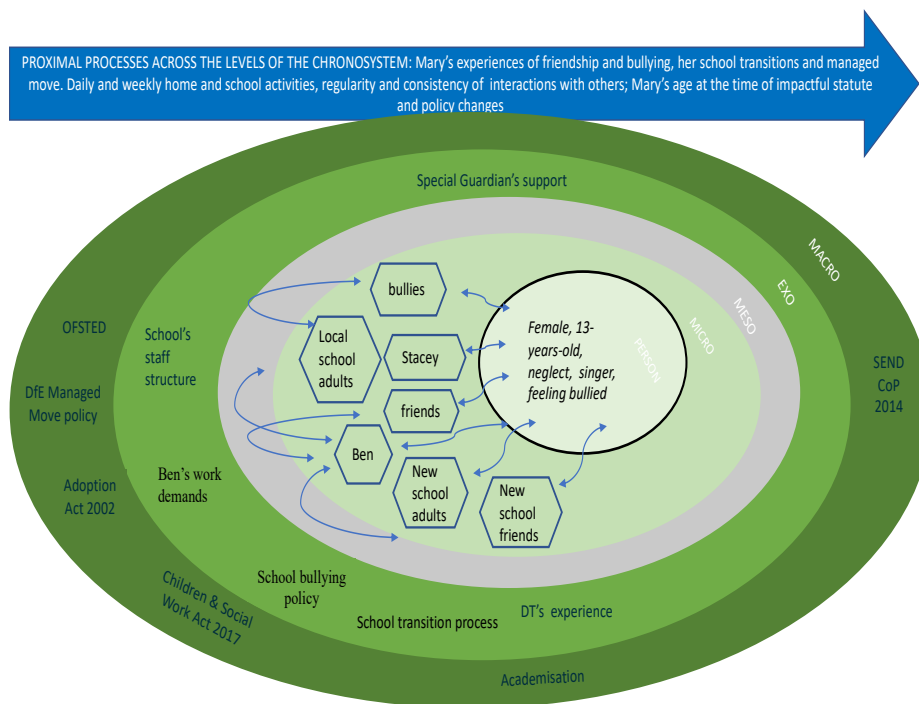
At the end of Year 6, Mary transitioned from the local primary school to the LSS, 4-5 miles away from her home. Ben said that he was worried when he found that at the LSS, Mary was placed with children who had bullied her at the second primary school. Over time the number of children bullying Mary increased, '*she has come up here and it's not only the boys who are bullying her at (LSS), now it's loads of girls*

and there is literally girls in every single class in her Year, so it's not like you can change lessons,' (Ben).

The DT at the LSS is also the SENCo and was previously a Head of Year in the school. She has held the DT/SENCo role for approximately 4 months. She has completed a SEND module in a masters course and hopes to start her SENCo Award in September 2019.

Figure 6.2

Graphic Representation of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT Framework (1999) Mapping Elements of Mary's Life.



6.2 Mary's family

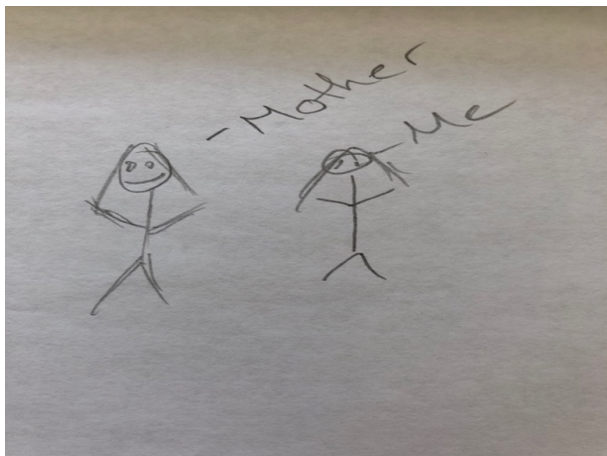
Mary is 12-years-old, she has lived alone with Ben for three years. At birth, Mary lived with her mother, Stacey, and her biological father. Following their split, Ben had a relationship with Stacey and met Mary when she was 18-months-old. Ben describes himself as Mary's step-father. Ben and Stacey were together, 'on and off for two years maybe three.' Ben described Stacey's relationship with heroin, 'I don't

know if you'd class her as an addict. I suppose she was'. After Ben and Stacey separated, Mary stayed with Ben each weekend until he moved further away and then she stayed with him on alternate weekends and throughout the summer holidays. Stacey became pregnant with a new partner and Social Care supported her. When the baby was born Social Care gave him to his biological father. At this time, Mary disclosed physical and mental abuse by Stacey to Ben. Ben said that 'the social worker advised that I take a private, legal case out and get guardianship.' Six months after Mary had lived with Ben a SGO was granted.

Mary has not maintained a relationship with Stacey and until recently had not spoken to her biological father. Ben explained that their next-door neighbour is a friend of Mary's biological father. Ben introduced Mary to her father 'because she knew who he was but he'd never spoken to her...now they acknowledge each other and he sent a fiver through me for her birthday this year and he sent her a birthday message on Facebook, which she finds a bit weird,' (Ben).

Figure 6.3

Not Belonging - 'mum and me'



In Mary's 'not belonging' picture, she drew and labelled two stick figures, 'mum and me,' (Figure 6.3). She did not draw any contextual information and explained that at no time when she was with Stacey did she feel she belonged.

Me: So, you've drawn your mum and you. And are you going to draw where that might be or when that might be?

Mary: All the time I was living with her.

Me: And was it just you and her?

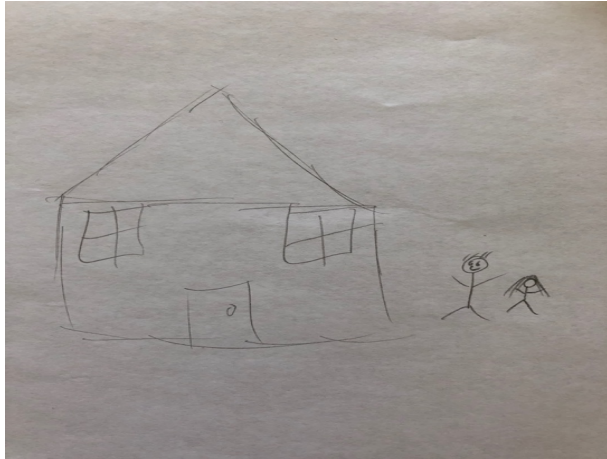
Mary: Yeah...and then she got a boyfriend and then she had my brother and then...yeah.

Me: No house in that one I notice

Mary: (Smiling) No.

Figure 6.4

Belonging - 'when I moved up here'



In contrast to her picture of 'not belonging' Mary's belonging picture was of her and Ben (Figure 6.4).

Me: Ok, so that's a house...and who is that?

Mary: (gestures towards her dad with her head). And that's me. ...That's basically it.

Me: And is this house your house now?

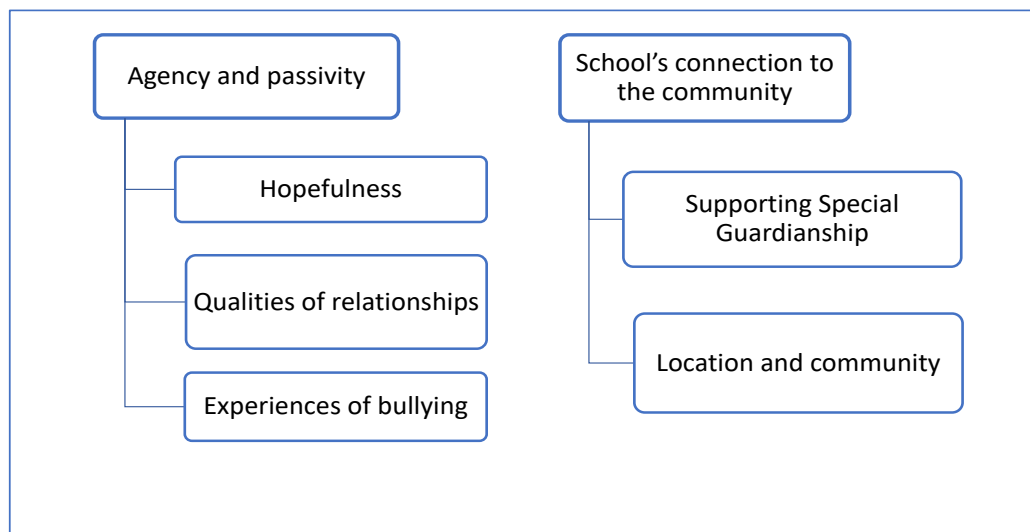
Mary: Yes. So basically when I moved up here.

6.3 Themes

The overarching themes generated from the data are *agency and passivity* and *school's connection to the community*. Each of these themes are constructed from subthemes (Figure 6.5).

Figure 6.5

Table of Mary's Overarching and Subthemes Generated from the Case Data



6.3.1 Agency and passivity

This overarching theme is derived from the subthemes of *hopefulness, qualities of relationships and experiences of bullying*. Here, agency can be defined as the level of control and decision-making capacity participants have over events in their life.

6.3.2 Hopefulness (person characteristics)

This first subtheme refers to a person characteristic shared by Mary and Ben; *hopefulness* towards Mary's future at her new school (NS). This is a particularly salient characteristic in Ben's narrative related to Mary's concept of school belonging. He relies heavily on *hopefulness*. He is hopeful that Mary's social interactions and her learning will improve, which in turn will lead to a stronger sense of belonging.

'I am really hopeful for her to go to a new school and to have a little bit of help with friendships so the same rocky road doesn't happen again,' (Ben).

However, Ben's *hopefulness* might be considered as a risk to belonging because it reveals a lack of agency regarding his decision making process and choice of school for Mary. He has not visited the school but has chosen it based on what others say about it,

'there is a big problem here (LSS) and I'm really hoping...everyone I've spoken to about (new secondary) says it's amazing,' (Ben).

'So I chose (NS) because I've had so many people say it's an amazing school and they really look after everyone and they have got very few issues,' (Ben).

Indeed, Ben's comments indicate little understanding of the impact transitions can have on a young person's feeling of school belonging. His *hopefulness* underpins Mary's transition, rather than a sense of agency which might involve him communicating Mary's needs directly to staff in the NS,

Me: And is there someone at the new school who Mary knows already so she feels like she belongs?

Ben: No, today is the first time we phoned anyone and they seemed really lovely.

'The named person (DT) seems really, really nice and is a singing teacher. I did mention that I am her step-father and she has an SGO but I'm not sure how much they are aware of but if they speak to the Head here then they'll probably get a fairly good idea,' (Ben).

As well as conveying Ben's passive *hopefulness*, the above excerpts from his interview connect strongly with the following subtheme of *qualities of relationships* with regard to Mary's *hopefulness* for her future in the NS.

6.3.3 Qualities of relationships

The second subtheme is *qualities of relationships*, which occurs within the Mary-local secondary school (LSS) and Mary-new school (NS) microsystems. Mary spoke about qualities she considers to be important in her school relationships. Mary rated her feeling of school belonging in her new school '9' out of 10, because of others showing support, kindness and listening skills.

Mary: That would be a 9.

Me: Wow. Tell me what makes it a 9?

Mary: They're like really supportive and everyone is being really kind to me.

Me: So, everyone is kind...and who is everyone?

Mary: Like teachers and the students.

She spoke of feeling supported, listened to and of other's kindness and associated these emerging elements with a cheerful and happy emotional state in school and at home.

Me: So in the life of someone who is going to a school where they are really supportive what is happening? What would I see?

Mary: They are happy. Cheerful all the time.

Me: Ok

Mary: They have a good mood...a good attitude I guess

Me: Ok so how would anyone know that?

Mary: they are happy, smiling, spring in their step...I don't know

Me: ok so in a school where everyone's kind what's happening for that person?

Mary: She'll feel more confident, she'll feel happy. She'll be like...I don't know. She'll get up every morning and know that everyone's kind.

These excerpts suggest a virtuous cycle in Mary's school belonging; the better Mary's social relationships the more positive her emotional state, which in turn improves her relationships and so on. Consequently, the qualities in relationship strengthen Mary's feelings of school belonging. The following piece supports this idea,

Me: Ok so in a school where no one listens [emergent pole] or listens [contrast]?

Mary: Listens

Me: What is happening for this person?

Mary: They will probably be encouraged to speak more, like speak out more and probably be able to speak to people more.

Me: Ok, does that person feel a stronger sense of belonging?

Mary: It helps them...like...speaking up changes their mind... Other people. You feel like you're involved.

In contrast to the strong feeling of belonging at the NS, Mary rated the LSS as '4', presenting a relatively polarised account, where teachers did not help or listen and the children were 'not nice.'

Me: What would your school belonging be on the scale if you were thinking about (LSS)?

Mary: 4

Me: Ok, why 4?

Mary: Cos the teachers don't help at all, not many of the kids are nice, none of the teachers listen to me...um... it was just generally horrible school. They put me with all the worst people in the seating plan.

Mary's narrative reflects her relative *passivity* in the LSS situation and she speaks negatively about the teachers, the children and the '*horrible school.*' Mary's answers also reflect her limited agency in maintaining relationships and this connects with Ben's passive *hopefulness* indicating that both position others as responsible for Mary's sense of school belonging. Neither mention Mary's early, neglectful experiences and its possible association with Mary's social and emotional development as a reason for why her LSS experiences were so difficult. Below, the DT's comments reflect those of Mary and Ben, indicating her limited agency in the managed move process by suggesting that Mary will benefit from a new school environment because of its newness rather than any specific intervention to help Mary to develop a sense of belonging,

'When we talk about managed moves as a school it's because the person needs a fresh start for their behaviour but this (Mary's move) is more of a choice that's been made.'(DT)

'So she (Mary) is being managed for her own benefit socially because I think that they (Ben and Mary) wanted to give her a fresh start. She had a lot of clashes here,' (DT).

In the above excerpts, the DT uses the word 'they' and suggests that others made the decision, the *hopefulness* and *passivity* in her comments resonate with Mary's and Ben's. She justifies the managed move by mentioning Mary's 'clashes', the *quality of relationships* with her peers. The DT does not mention *bullying* and also avoids talking about Mary's guardianship status as a feature of her maintaining *relationships*.

6.3.4 Experiences of bullying

This subtheme refers to the proximal processes within the school microsystem and its impact upon the home microsystem. It presents as a person characteristic and a mesosystemic feature. Over time, within the LSS and NS microsystems, Mary's sense of belonging has been strongly influenced by the *quality of relationships* with her peers. Ben described Mary's *experiences of bullying* from mid-way through Year 6 until now. Although being bullied indicates Mary's passive engagement, as a consequence of these experiences Mary has exhibited choice and agency; she has chosen to stop going to teen gym classes, trampolining and Air Cadets, and she requested the school move.

'A few times over the two years me and Mary have said it's really bad again and it (moving school) has been mentioned a few times and it's always been something which has been wanted by her.' (Ben)

In order to build and maintain a sense of school belonging during the transition involved in managed moves planning, careful operationalisation and regular review is required. Without this the move is precarious. However, this has not happened because Mary refused to attend the LSS for several weeks before she started going to the NS.

Without careful planning, Mary is reliant on her social and emotional skills to enable her to develop new relationships at the NS. Ben described two close relationships which Mary was able to develop and maintain for a while at the LSS. Both of these had an influence on her feelings of belonging. Mary is able to maintain one close friendship at a time and Ben explained that when this is going well, Mary is untroubled by the *experiences of bullying*, but when the friendship ends the negative experiences of bullying return.

'She got a boyfriend. They were together for nearly a year. He distanced himself from a load of his mates...it was because she was saying he can't be friends with this person or that person, and finally he said I'll finish with that...She bounced back pretty well but then all the bullying started again.' (Ben)

Ben's responses indicate an intense quality in Mary's friendships which can lead to her encouraging the friend to isolate themselves from others which ultimately damages her friendship,

'And then she met a girl and became friends with her...about three months ago and maybe Mary was a bit full on, and they were Facetiming all the time and she'd come over and stay at mine a couple of weekends and we all went out to the cinema and different places and everything was going brilliantly and I was going to do a CAMHS referral before and then all of a sudden she's friendly and everything is all good and then the bullies got to this other girl and she has not been friends with her since.'(Ben)

The proximal process of bullying within the LSS microsystem has left Ben concerned about Mary's mental health, *'if we don't get to the bottom of this sort of stuff I'm worried about her mental health massively'* (Ben). However, he has moved Mary's school instead of seeking help in this area.

6.3.5 School's connection to the community

The second overarching theme is school's connection to the community. The DT's and Ben's definition of belonging converge, sharing similar content involving being part of a community, a location, a sense of where you should be.

Just feeling part of something so either part of a family or community or school as a community and a family combined if you like, feeling that you can walk in the door and people know your name and that they might know a little bit about you to be able to have a conversation, that you have got people that you can go to if you need to go to them and they will respond positively and feeling a little bit of control and ownership of what you are part of as well. (DT)

Me: What is your understanding of belonging?

Ben: To me? Where you are from, where you feel at home, where you should be.

This overarching theme explores these ideas further. It consists of the subthemes *supporting special guardianship* and *location and community*.

6.3.6 Supporting special guardianship (proximal processes)

The first subtheme concerns the activities and interventions provided by school and the local community and the impact on Mary's school belonging. This theme connects to both overarching themes. Ben said that he had asked staff at the LSS to help Mary to develop her friendships because of her previous peer experiences. Ben was not informed of any action as a result of his request, which led to him feel concern that staff did not understand Mary's needs.

Ben: Ever since she started here I've been on the phone to (home school liaison) so many times. Right from the start I was saying I'm really concerned about Mary, can you give her a little bit more? Let me know if she's sat on her own at break time. They didn't contact me, but they said that they'd have an extra look out and when I did ring they said, 'She's fine'.

Me: Do you think that their picture was accurate?

Ben: I don't know because some of my friends kids have said she just sits on her own but the school seemed to think that she was ok.

Indeed, the DT expressed that the school's system for identifying children who live in guardianship is less robust than it is for adopted children or those in care, *'We are clear when people are in care but not so much in guardianship...We do ask about adoption but actually not having seen the letter recently I don't know if there is guardianship on there,'* (DT).

Despite the above examples of the LSS's limited processes around special guardianship, there are some specific school activities and interventions the DT has introduced which she considered to be helpful to young people living in guardianship, such as changing language, *'parent's evenings aren't called that they are called progress evenings because we've adapted that,'* (DT).

The DT also described an invitation-only club which would develop young people's belonging,

'There is a new SEN/disadvantaged PE club that is invitation only for certain students that may be struggling a little bit at lunchtime and they will have an invitation to that so they will feel like they belong to a group,' (DT).

She added that Mary was not one of those invited. Had Mary known of this club and expected to be invited, this may have presented a risk to Mary's belonging as it might increase her feelings of exclusion.

As the interview progressed several of the DT's answers suggested that the research interview itself improved her professional level of *agency* towards developing processes to promote school belonging for children in guardianship, *'there are so many clubs but actually that idea of belonging...I think we probably need to start using that term.'* She raised the possibility of using the library as a space to encourage pupil's sense of safety and belonging, *'It can be somewhere to go and is a safe space,'* (DT). She spoke of extending the school's review system used by the school for pupils in care and recognised that contact with birth family members parents can be difficult for children in guardianship and influence their feelings in school.

'The (foster) carers sometimes get in touch and let us know about contact so we know if they are going to be a bit more wobbly when they come in and we should really do the same with these children.' (DT)

6.3.7 Location and community

This subtheme considers the influence of school proximity on Mary's school belonging. The *location* of the LSS is in a small, relatively rural town. Mary lives five miles away and when she was attending she caught a local bus to school each day. Ben's responses indicate that at the end of Year 6, he had a limited choice of secondary school *'I didn't really want to send her here but it was the only one'* (Ben).

However, the DT has a different view and considers the school to be closely linked with the local community *'I think it is a lovely community and it is a very inclusive school.'* The difference in views may be connected to Ben's experiences of Mary feeling bullied at her local primary school and the LLS.

Had Mary's community experiences and relationships been more positive and sustained, the close proximity of her home and school would probably have supported her feeling of school belonging at the LSS, but they were not. The NS is approximately an hours bus ride away. In the subtheme of *hopefulness* Ben's responses suggest his hope that the NS will provide Mary with a stronger sense of school belonging, but location of the school presents a potential risk to this because of the impact on his work commitments.

'Getting her there is going to be a nightmare because I'm going to have to drop her to a bus stop in the morning and then pay for a taxi from when the bus drops her off back home in the evening and say she does two or three after school clubs it's an hour's drive for me to pick her up on top of wherever I'm working so you could be talking about 1 and a half to 2 hours,' (Ben).

For Mary, travelling to a school so far away from her local community presents a risk to the friendships she had made at the LSS and she described ways in which she is maintaining them.

Me: What happens about feelings of school belonging if someone goes to a school a long way away from their home?

Mary: Well, for me I've got some friends from [LSS] so after school on the bus I meet them cos they finish earlier...so they meet me at the bus stop so we basically hang around after school....and father comes and picks me up.

6.4 Conclusion

Mary's case illustrates the importance of peer relationships on school belonging. Her emotional and social development and its impact on her friendships have not been identified and met. Mary's 'clashes' were not perceived through the lens of a young

person living in guardianship. Instead the prolonged experiences of bullying have led to Mary requesting to move to another, more distant school, the location of which presents a risk to her school belonging.

The case also identifies the importance of communication between home and school microsystems. Communication was unplanned and infrequent, perhaps leaving Ben and Mary feeling unheard. Ben and Mary's sense of agency presents as an important factor in this case, suggesting that a low level of agency has reduced Mary's feelings of school belonging.

The DT is new to the role and her limited experience and knowledge of guardianship seems to be an obstacle to Mary's belonging. However, she recognises this and intends to do more to develop school processes and support to encourage school belonging.

Chapter 7: Fred

Data from three semi-structured interviews contribute to this case: Fred's, his guardian, Kerry's (maternal grandmother) and the DT's. Each interview took place in Fred's school. The case will be presented by describing Fred's school and family contexts and mapping it onto Bronfenbrenner's PPCT framework (1999), (Figures 7.1 & 7.2), before considering the overarching and subthemes generated from the data (Figure 7.4).

Meeting Kerry and Fred proved difficult perhaps reflecting reluctance at being involved in the research despite their agreement: the first interview with Kerry was cancelled because she did not attend and then when we did meet Fred accompanied her which limited our time together because he waited outside. When I first went to meet Fred he had been excluded from school and subsequently when we did meet he was collected from the school's 'isolation room'. Fred's interview was the shortest of all of the young people (thirty-five minutes) because he wanted to leave when the end-of-day school bell rang.

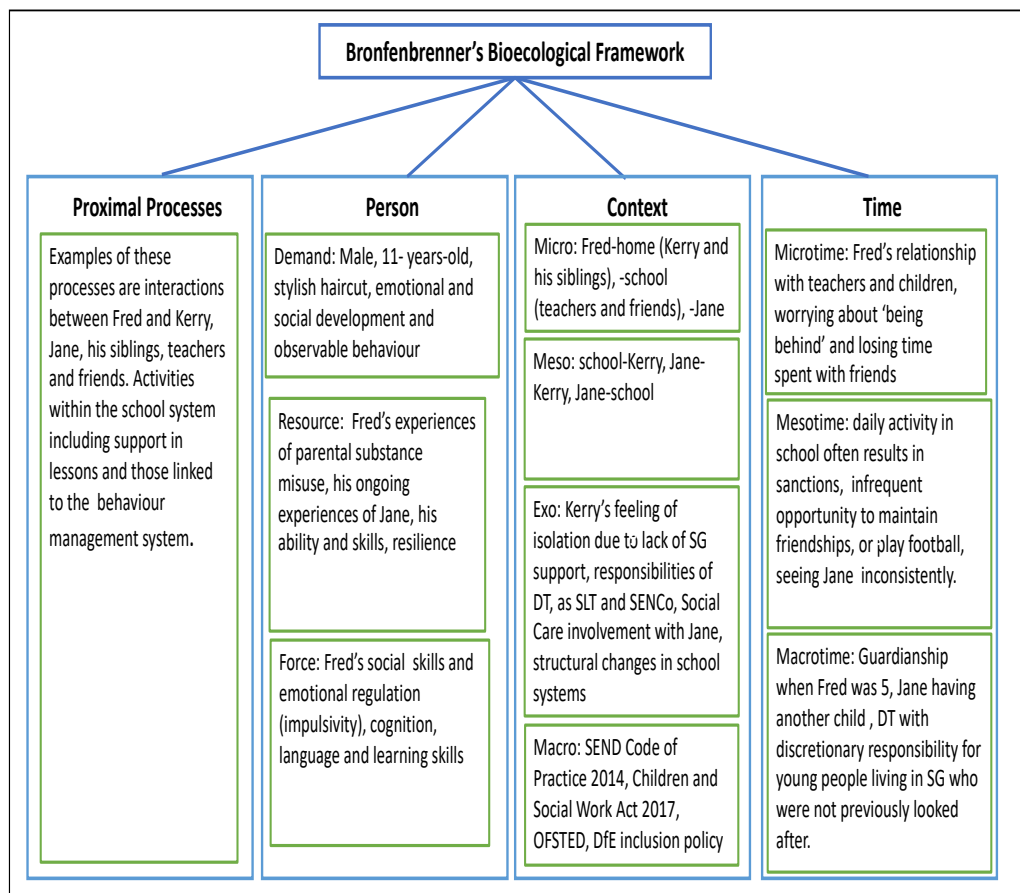
7.1 School context

Fred is 11-years-old. He attends a local mainstream secondary school and is in Year 7. Previously Fred attended two primary schools. Kerry said that he had '*just started going to the first primary school*' when he had to move home. Fred remembers this differently, that he was at his first primary school '*for 2 or 3 years*'.

The DT role was recently given to the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) who is part of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). She was not in post when Fred started Year 7. The previous DT role and responsibilities were '*deputised by the safeguarding lead*' to someone '*whose knowledge and expertise of SEND isn't as high,*' (DT).

Figure 7.1

Bronfenbrenner's PPCT Framework (1999) with Elements of Fred's Life.



7. 2 Fred's family

Kerry has been involved in Fred's care since his birth, she '*was there when he (Fred) was born,*' (Kerry). Before the SGO, Fred lived with his younger brother, Robbie, his mother, Jane and her boyfriend. Fred has never had contact with his biological father.

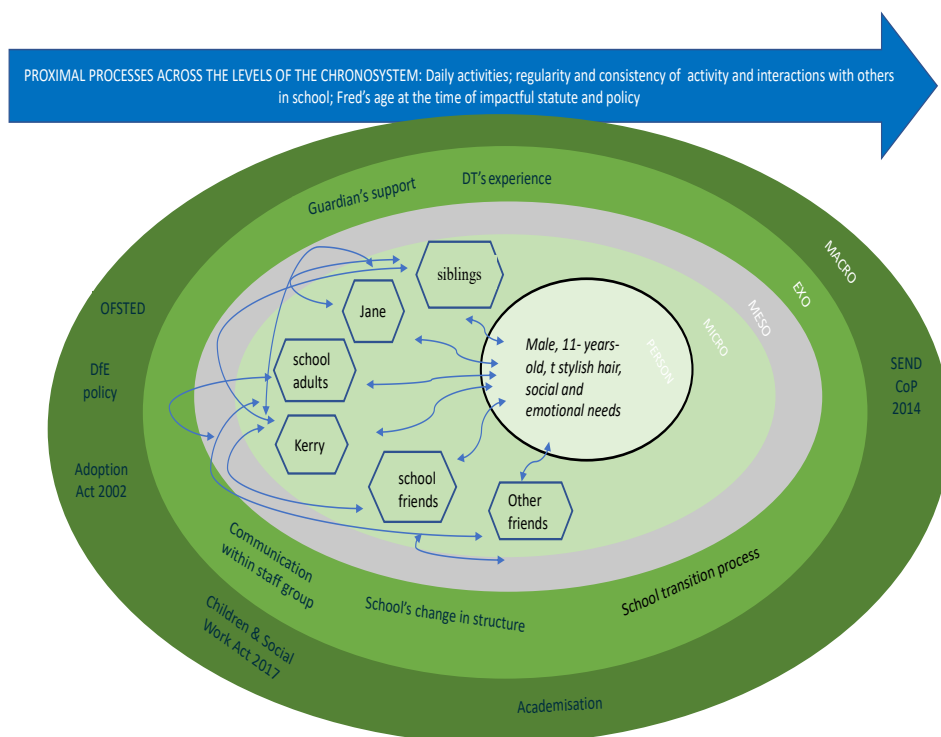
When Fred was 4-years-old, Social Care stipulated that Jane was only allowed supervised contact with Fred and Robbie due to Jane's boyfriend's use of drugs. Kerry agreed to leave her flat and her job to move in with Jane, '*to help to safeguard the children,*' (Kerry). At that time Jane was pregnant.

Within months of moving in, an incident between Jane and Kerry resulted in Jane no longer being allowed to live with her children. To avoid the children being placed in care, Kerry moved to emergency accommodation with Fred (then 5 years-old), Robbie (2 years-old) and Leila (4 months-old). Kerry was granted special guardianship within three months of moving.

In the interview, Kerry explained that Jane’s situation improved over time, ‘*She is doing really well now. She herself became an addict [but is now recovering], she’s since had another baby. She’s got a flat.*’ (Kerry). Jane sees the children regularly, ‘*they can see her when they want, they can have sleepovers, she will stay at ours for sleepovers...we do things together,*’ (Kerry).

Figure 7.2

Bronfenbrenner’s PPCT Framework (1999) Mapping Elements of Fred’s Life.

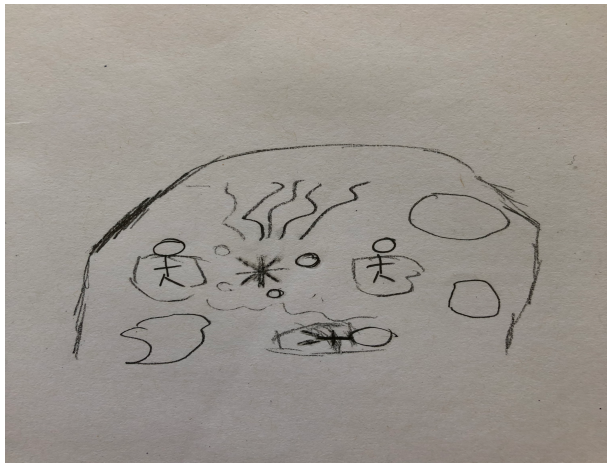


At home Fred can become emotionally dysregulated and he has hit Kerry (during our interview she had a bruised face), ‘*After he hit me the other day the police were looking for him and he went to his mum’s at 1.30 a.m. He stayed there for a couple of days,*’(Kerry).

Fred's relationship with Jane is important to him. Sometimes he relates to her as vulnerable, seeking care and at other times their roles are reversed. In his 'not belonging' picture Fred drew 'a homeless man' (Figure 7.3) which might be related to his experience of Jane's homelessness.

Figure 7.3

Not Belonging - 'a homeless man'



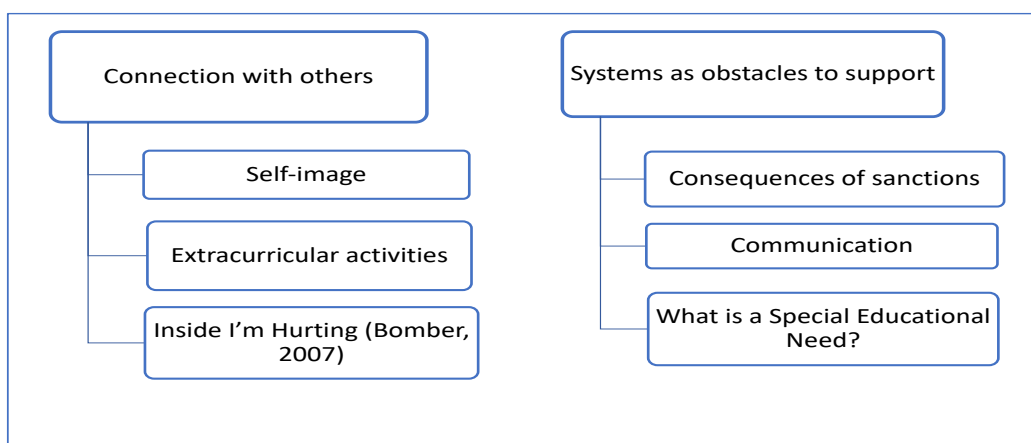
'He worries about her. My daughter used to live with us for 6 months because she was homeless and she had her baby and then when she left home he admitted to the lady at CAMHS, 'well nan was there to look after mum, but who's going to look after her now?' (Kerry). Indeed, Fred's 'not belonging' picture was of 'a homeless man,' (Figure 7.3).

7.3 Themes

The two overarching themes generated from the data are *connection with others* and *systems as obstacles to support*. Each of these themes are constructed from a number of subthemes (Figure 7.4).

Figure 7.4

Table of Fred's Overarching and Subthemes Generated from the Case Data



7.3.1 Connection with others

7.3.2 Self-image (person characteristics and Fred-friends microsystem)

Fred describes himself negatively and seems to rely more on observable person characteristics to maintain friendships, such as what he wears, who he is seen with, and his hairstyle,

'he's got very low self-esteem. I say to him 'you need to go to school Fred, you don't want to grow up thick' and he'll say, 'well I am thick and stupid anyway,' (Kerry).

'He won't let me get it cut. I said to him 'you have to let me get it cut' and he won't. He needs it cut a little bit so it's not in his eyes,' (Kerry).

A further example of this is the proximal process of wearing a school uniform, which for Fred and Kerry presents a challenge to Fred's self-image. In contrast, the DT considers the uniform as supporting school belonging, *'...being in a house system...with different colours on the ties on the uniform, can lead to a massive sense of belonging,' (DT).*

Kerry: He's moaning about the school uniform because it's being changed...they've got a new uniform. He's said 'I'm not wearing that.

Me: What's the problem with it?

Kerry: It's got a blazer and they can't wear Converse shoes. He said, 'they've got to come from Clarks!'

Me: What else effects your feeling of school belonging?

Fred: Don't know...shoes and uniform. I don't get why we have to wear it like (other local secondary school). It's itchy as well, the shirts.'

Kerry explained that Fred lost his friendships in the transition from primary to secondary school. Without a deeper connection to peers, Fred relies on his *self-image* to relate to them and this includes Fred's exhibition of increasingly risky behaviour, *'He says he's not going to be called a pussy,' (Kerry),*

'All his friends were coming from his primary school and then when he came here he separated from the good ones and got in with the bad ones. That's when it got bad really when he was hanging around them and he was stealing and they found vapes on him in school,' (Kerry).

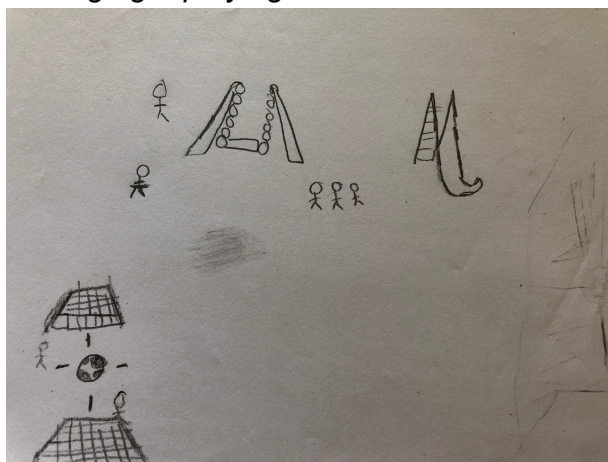
The importance of his friends' perceptions of him extends to his home context,

'When he didn't want to go to parent's evening with me I thought he just didn't want to go but when I said, 'What if mum took you?' He said, 'Okay then,' so I thought 'Thanks very much! So you don't want some old granny on your arm? He said, 'because my friends think my mum is cool,' (Kerry).

7.3.3 Extracurricular activities (proximal processes within the Fred-school microsystem)

In the past, Fred has *connected with others* through football. He directly links this activity to belonging. Fred's 'belonging' picture was of him and his 'older brother (17 years old) *playing football on a football pitch in a park*' (Figure 7.5), (Kerry did not mention Fred's older sibling, which might suggest a more complicated family context than presented in the interviews).

Figure 7.5
Belonging - 'playing football'



Fred's connection to football is also linked to a memory of when he lived with Jane (before he was 5 years-old),

Fred: When I lived with my mum I used to play it a lot

Me: Who did you play with?

Fred: One of my mates. I can't remember his name now because I moved.

Kerry also mentioned football as something Fred enjoyed in his primary school. *'Fred used to do football club at his primary school but he doesn't do anything here.'* (Kerry).

The DT described the school's hope to improve access to extracurricular activities as a way to develop school belonging in *'vulnerable groups'* within the school,

'We are launching a new co-curricular programme for Year 7s next year...because there was a huge development for extracurricular programmes here and the pupils accessing them were sporty students and not our children in care or vulnerable groups,' (DT).

7.3.4 'Inside I'm hurting' (Bomber, 2007), (Person characteristics and the mesosystem)

This subtheme borrows its title from a book written by Louise Bomber about children who have experienced early relational difficulties. It promotes understanding behaviour as a means of communicating emotional needs and calls for a relational approach in schools, one which focuses on key staff members connecting with pupils using a responsive and well attuned system of communication. When viewed through this lens, Fred's behaviour reflects his emotional and social needs and the school's response will have an influence on his feelings of school belonging.

When Fred was at primary school, Kerry shared Fred's experiences with staff and she was pleased with the interventions provided which met his emotional and mental health needs, *'At (previous primary school) he did Thrive (attachment-based intervention). They knew about our situation so he did have help and they were really good,'* (Kerry). Kerry has not shared the same information with the staff in Fred's current school.

Now, Fred's behaviour includes self-harm, which led to a brief intervention from CAMHS, *'He only went twice,'* (Kerry). Kerry remains vigilant and she informed staff,

'Then he cut his arm open with a piece of glass and had to have 5 stitches. He used to cut himself on his legs because I want to look at his arms because that's where he was doing it,' (Kerry).

Me: Does school know about the self-harm?

Kerry: They do yes. I've had meetings with them and they said to him if he is struggling with anything in lessons he is to tell them. But Fred doesn't because he doesn't want to be here and he doesn't care.

From the excerpt above, staff response to Fred's self-harming behaviour involves encouraging him to ask a teacher for help. This assumes that Fred is able both to recognise his feelings and trust the teachers to help him. Kerry explained that Fred finds it difficult to form relationships with others but she attributes Fred's reluctance to ask for help with him not wanting to be at the school, a low level of school belonging. Neither the staff nor Kerry associate Fred's behaviour with his early and ongoing relational experiences despite evidence that the quality of relationships with staff extend to those with his peers,

'He doesn't seem to like any of the teachers so if he's not getting on with them he's going to feel a bit...he started to get verbal with them, 'everybody is horrible,' his friends... he hasn't got a lot of friends here,' (Kerry).

'I hang around with some people from here but I hang around with other people from (other local secondary school). All my friends are at (other local secondary school),' (Fred).

7.3.5 Systems as obstacles to support

The second overarching theme is systems as obstacles to support, which presents a shift of focus from Fred's person characteristics to the school microsystem and the meso and exosystemic influences. The school adapts and organises its support systems in response to the systemic influences of statute, guidance, policy and standards, for example, the Children and Social Work Act (2017), SEND CoP,

(2014), DfE policy and OFSTED. The DT spoke positively about recent changes in the school's current performance,

'There has been a lot of restructuring and a lot of staff have left sadly,' (DT) but *'There is a really supportive learning environment here which wasn't here before,'* (DT).

Fred's school has evolved into one which is highly reliant on well-defined systems and this influences school belonging, hence *systems as obstacles to support* is the second overarching theme.

7.3.6 Consequences of sanctions (proximal process in the Fred-school microsystem leading to changes in person characteristics)

There are two influential intervention systems operating in the school; the SEN system and the behaviour management system. They are managed by different members of the SLT, there is a tension between the systems, the first aims to personalise the school environment in an equitable way, whereas the second aims to treat young people equally, through a series of sanctions and rewards, without due regard to need. Despite exhibiting behaviour often associated with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs Fred's behaviour is met through the behaviour management system, perhaps because of the limited information the school has about him and the lack of understanding of guardianship families more generally. The first and second sanction is a verbal warning and the third is spending a whole school day and an after-school detention in *'isolation'* (a room in school where no work is set). Fred is often sent to isolation which is having a significant impact on his feelings of school belonging. It featured in Fred's and Kerry's narrative,

Fred: I refused to do my work because I didn't know what I was doing. I got isolated for it and that's why I'm in there for like three weeks.

Me: What do you think it was for?

Fred: So, I got isolated for not doing my work and drawing a line without a ruler and then I failed all of the other isolations until now.

Kerry: When Fred comes home he'll say to me it (isolation) was for something really stupid. For one instance he drew a line on his paper without using a ruler and got a warning so then he started getting verbal and got another warning and I think you get three and he was sent to isolation for a day.

Me: How often is he in isolation?

Kerry: A lot. Three times last week...He says it's not fair.

Fred considers his isolation time as detrimental to his friendships, '*I don't really hang around with many people because of isolation,*' (Fred). When I explored this further, Fred related being in isolation with worrisome emotions and with the consequence of falling behind in his learning,

Me: So if this person isn't hanging around with others because they are in isolation. What else is happening for this person?

Fred: They might feel lonely, sad...maybe depressed.

Fred: In lesson...some lessons I get help a lot because I'm behind.

Me: You're behind? How do you know that?

Fred: Because I've been in isolation for three weeks.

The behaviour management system is inflexible and instead of changing it to meet Fred's developmental needs they look to Fred to change his behaviour,

'They've said 'how can we help this to stop from happening again?' He says he doesn't know' (Kerry).

The above excerpt indicates that Fred does not know how to change his behaviour so that he can remain in lessons and spend time with his friends. He accepts that the sanctions are a legitimate way to help him to change his behaviour so that they (staff) can teach him,

Fred: They try to make me have a better education I guess

Me: How do they do that?

Fred: By punishing me with isolation but it doesn't do anything

Me: So you think that by punishing you they are trying to help your education?

Fred: Yeah. So you don't keep getting isolation, but I get isolation a lot.

Fred seems to be confused as to why the sanctions are not working for him, but without a close relationship with a staff member to communicate and respond differently his behaviour is likely to continue.

7.3.7 Communication (mesosystem)

Within the school microsystem and the home-school mesosystem, communication relies heavily upon text or email. Although these methods provide a quick, time efficient way of communicating a specific message, both minimise reciprocity and *connection*. Both Kerry and the DT raise this as problematic,

'When he gets isolation I'll get a text and it will say your child won't be home until 4.05 today because they're in isolation and it doesn't give me a reason,' (Kerry).

'So there was a child in care excluded yesterday...but I received an email to say he was excluded and there was no conversation before that email,' (DT).

These written methods of communication between home-school serve to maintain a distance between the microsystems. This is problematic within the context of Kerry's response when asked what belonging means to her, *'just being loved by people around you, not being alone...I feel like I'm on my own a lot...I don't feel like I belong anywhere (crying),' (Kerry).*

The distance maintained by the communication method may also reduce Kerry's trust in the staff's ability to meet Fred's needs, she does not know how the staff are supporting him and worries about his progress as a result,

'I worry about him all the time because of what is going on with him. ..because of what he has told me about school. Every time he comes into school I'm waiting for someone to ring,' (Kerry).

'I don't know what he gets here...I don't think he gets anything so he's just left to fall further and further behind' (Kerry).

The limited communication between home-school means that staff have not informed Kerry about the support Fred receives in some lessons and Kerry has not shared information about Fred's experiences. Neither fully understand Fred's needs within the school context, which has had a negative impact on his sense of school belonging. This is unfortunate because the DT exhibits some understanding of what might help to strengthen Fred's feeling of school belonging,

'The importance of relationships with significant adults play a big part in the child's journey of education' (DT) and *'I think there is a real need for students to understand why they are feeling a certain way,'* (DT).

'We aren't experts in the field but I try to develop teacher's understanding about why children might behave in the way that they are and those presenting behaviours are normally due to attachment styles,' (DT),

Within the school the methods of communication also obstruct relationships within the staff group, which the DT considers to be an obstacle to young people's school belonging. Restricted information sharing between staff leads to the needs of 'vulnerable children' not being understood, identified and met which threatens their school belonging. For example, when trying to share information with teachers about a young person in care, she received an email which she experienced as unhelpful,

'As a teaching strategy it is about 'how have you made reference to that child in the class?' I got an email straight away saying that I hadn't stipulated that teachers are not to tell other people that the child is in care,' (DT).

'I'm not being given information about why children are in care, I can't be part of the solution if I don't know what they have experienced,' (DT).

7.3.8 What is a special educational need?

This subtheme focuses on the SEN system operating in the school as an obstacle to Fred's school belonging. The DT explained that if a pupil has needs which fall into one of the four categories of need specified by the SEND CoP (2014) then their name is put on the school's SEN register and they will access appropriate support, thus strengthening their school belonging. The DT acknowledged that the category of SEMH needs is one which the school's SEN system struggles to manage because of its potential size and lack of clear identification criteria regarding what is 'additional to and different from' (SEND CoP, 2014).

'That category of need (SEMH) is the hardest, it's the biggest need within the school but I think it is because we don't know how to manage and identify it,' (DT).

'When they are receiving services such as CAMHS, does that mean they automatically go on the register? But if we're not doing something that is 'additional to and different from, that shouldn't go on the register,' (DT).

Fred is not on the register despite exhibiting behaviour related to SEMH needs, his associated behavioural needs are met through the behaviour management system (described above) which diminishes his feelings of belonging.

Fred not being on the SEN register meant that he did not have an enhanced transition meeting from primary to secondary school, to discuss how to support him, *'it didn't happen in Fred's case because he wasn't on the SEND register,' (DT)*. At the time of Fred's transition, the Children and Social Work Act (2017), was in place but school staff were unaware of the statutory requirement involving children living in special guardianship.

Me: So is that (transition meetings) only if they are on the SEND register?

DT: It was, but now, with Fred slipping through the net, it's making sure we know who those vulnerable students are who might not be on the SEN register.'

Reflecting on how to integrate the existing behaviour management, safeguarding and SEN school systems to develop the sense of belonging in school, the DT referred to a key concern within her dual DT/SENCo role,

'What I don't want to happen is to make a rod for my own back and see all of these vulnerable students being referred to me' (DT)

7.4 Conclusion

Fred's case represents the influence of macro and exo systemic elements on school belonging. The staff's response to these influences seem to be a reliance on systems, rather than connecting with Kerry and Fred through effective communication and information sharing. Fred's behaviour is not identified as SEMH within a SEN category, but is managed by a series of sanctions which is having a significant impact on his school belonging with particular regard to his friendships and learning progress. Despite the DT's awareness of attachment theory and associated interventions, Fred has not had access to these which has left both Kerry and Fred feeling isolated.

I arranged the DT interview some weeks after Fred and Kerry's research interviews, who told me that since my meeting with them, Fred and his siblings had been placed on the Child Protection register, and Jane had only supervised contact, because of her new partner's drug use.

Through the process of a managed move, the school staff agreed that Fred could try another local secondary school, where he said he had friends. This did not involve any additional intervention or support. Unfortunately, after some weeks of maintaining the behavioural expectations at the new school, Fred used offensive language against the Headteacher and had to return.

Chapter 8: Daisy

Data from three semi-structured interviews contribute to this case: Daisy's, her guardian, Cathy's (Daisy's maternal grandmother), and the DT's. Each interview took place in Daisy's primary school. Daisy seemed to enjoy the interview, hers was the longest of the young person's interviews (80 minutes). She took approximately 30 minutes to complete the belonging/not belonging pictures and was particular about how each looked. She consistently spoke about things which were not entirely relevant to the research and it took time to refocus her attention on specific topics.

The case will be presented by briefly describing Daisy's school and family contexts and mapping them onto Bronfenbrenner's PPCT framework (1999), (Figures 8.1 & 8.2) before considering the overarching and subthemes generated from the data (Figure 8.3).

8.1 School context

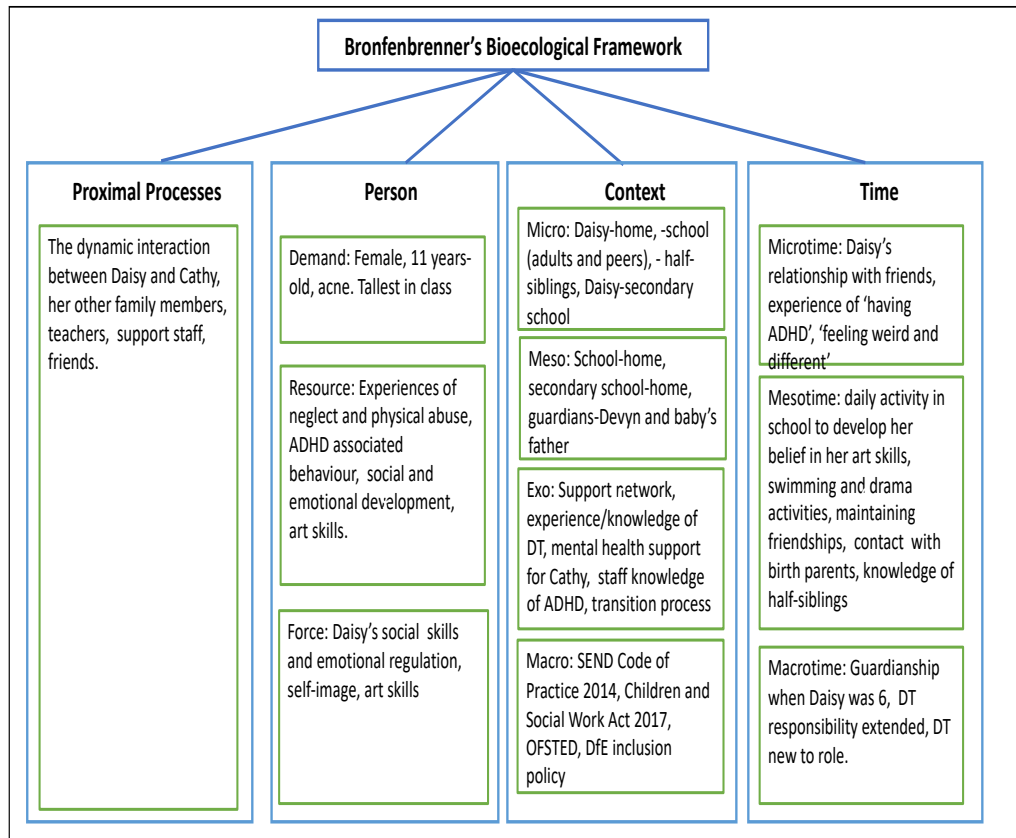
Daisy is 11 years-old, in Year 6. She was diagnosed with ADHD a year ago and she takes medication on school days. She is on the school's SEN register under the category of SEMH. Daisy started the school in Year 3, after living with Cathy for 14 months she moved schools, '*because she wanted to be somewhere where people didn't know,*' (Cathy). Each day, Daisy walks to school with Cathy and her younger half-brother, Jamie. Daisy's mother, Devyn, and her uncle went to this same school when they were young and there is a picture of them both in their school uniform, on the wall, in the school dining hall. At the end of this academic year Daisy will be going to the same local secondary school that Devyn attended. Cathy said that when Devyn started secondary, '*she went rapidly downhill...Got in with the wrong crowd, started mitching off (truanting) school, smoking, drinking.*'

The primary school has 450 children on roll. The DT is also the SENCo. She has been in role for approximately 6 months, since returning from maternity leave. The DT previously taught Daisy and has spent time getting to know Cathy. Before this role, the DT had the task of identifying pupils who attracted the Pupil Premium Plus

fund so she is aware of children living in guardianship. She is beginning to find out about the wider support available and to implement school processes to help them.

Figure 8.1

Bronfenbrenner's PPCT Framework (1999) with Elements of Daisy's Life



8.2 Daisy's family

Devyn gave birth to Daisy when she was 17-years-old. Cathy attended Devyn's first pregnancy scan, 'so we supported her' and has always been involved in Daisy's life. Cathy described Daisy's early life: At birth, Daisy lived with Devyn and her biological father. Throughout the pregnancy and following Daisy's birth, Devyn drank alcohol and took drugs. When Daisy was born, some of her care was shared between Cathy and Cathy's mother, whilst Devyn worked full-time.

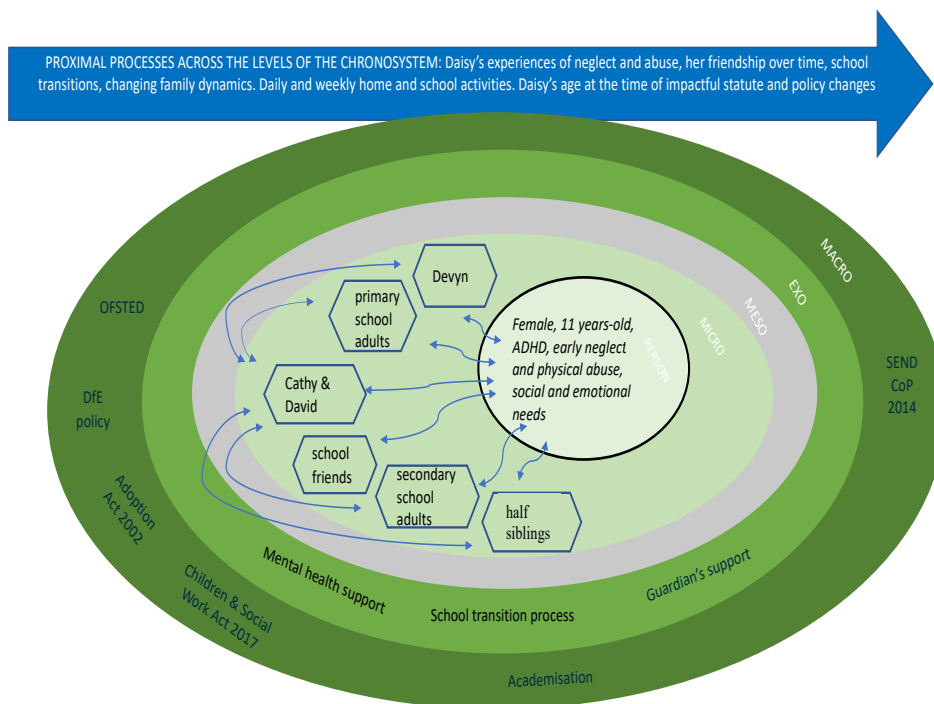
Daisy's biological father left the home soon after she was born and Daisy does not have contact with him. Cathy explained that after he left Devyn had a number of short-term relationships, which involved her moving to different parts of the country,

sometimes taking Daisy and sometimes leaving her with Cathy, ‘*she just lurched from relationship to relationship all the while drinking and using drugs.*’ During this time, Devyn gave birth to Daisy’s younger half-brother, Jamie.

On Jamie’s fourth birthday, he and Daisy (6 years-old) moved to live with Cathy and her husband David, as part of a Child Protection Plan, through neglect and significant physical abuse. Cathy applied for a ‘*child arrangement order with a view to getting a SGO*’. After a period of inconsistent contact, the children no longer see Devyn, they last saw her three years ago. Cathy has discovered that Devyn has had another baby and is pregnant again. Daisy has seen pictures of the baby, who lives close by with his biological father as the sole carer. Cathy recently told Daisy that Devyn is pregnant again. The situation has taken its toll on Cathy, who experiences anxiety and depression.

Figure 8.2

Bronfenbrenner’s PPCT Framework (1999) with Elements of Daisy’s Life.



8.3 Themes

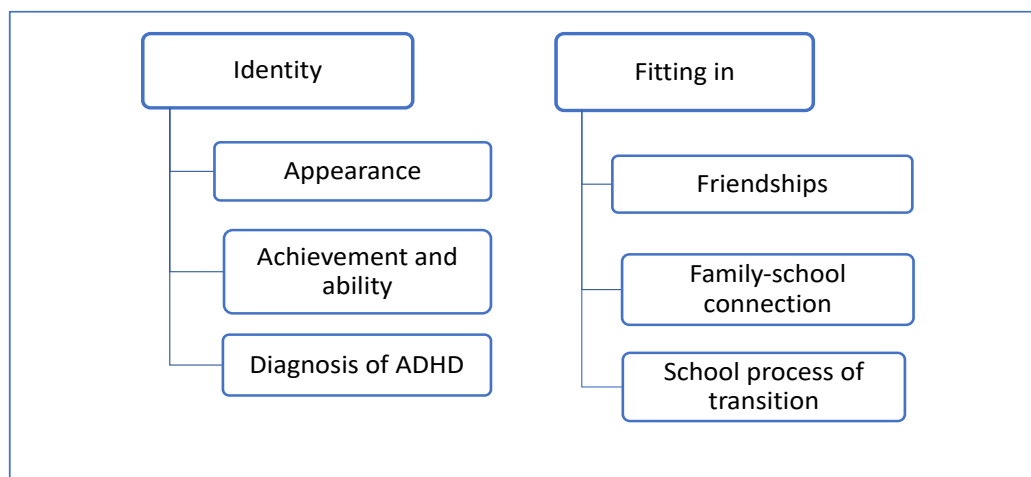
The overarching themes generated from the data are *identity* and *fitting in*. Each of these themes are constructed from a number of subthemes (Figure 8.3).

8.3.1 Identity

The first overarching theme of school belonging is *identity*. This consists the subthemes of *appearance*, *achievement and ability* and *diagnosis of ADHD*. Daisy's person characteristics play an important role in her experiences of school belonging.

Figure 8.3

Table of Daisy's Overarching and Subthemes Generated from the Case Data



8.3.2 Appearance

Daisy's self-image is a strong feature of her belonging and includes how she looks and her behaviour associated with ADHD, and the less visible aspects of intelligence and self-belief. Together these factors lead to her feeling different to other children and have reduced her feelings of belonging.

The demand characteristic of appearance featured in Daisy's belonging construct; specifically her outfit and her complexion. The character in the '*not belonging*' picture reflects herself,

It looks really weird (pointing to her picture). I wanted to do someone sat down and really upset, with jeans on because I like them. I always wear jeans when I go out. I normally wear pyjamas! How would it look? Would they look like that? (Daisy).

As well as her outfit, Daisy spoke about early onset acne, which makes her feel different to others within her peer group because of other children's reaction to it.

'Most of the time I feel like I don't fit in because I've got spots, acne they're called and not many people have them and I've got a really bad condition of it so...there is someone who used to say that he hated spots and that they are really ugly and he's got them now,'(Daisy).

Daisy explained that looking back, her feeling '*ugly*' has led to her not wanting to attend school, therefore this is an influential demand characteristic which has threatened her belonging. However, her *friendships* have mitigated this, which will be discussed later.

Daisy: I felt really left out and I didn't want to come to school for a while. And I felt much different to everyone else in the school because I used to think I was really ugly. I actually still do think I'm really ugly now at times...

Me: Ok. Because of how you think you look or because of other reasons?

Daisy: Yes, because of how I looked and I just didn't feel very like I belonged here.

Me: And what happened to change things?

Daisy: And then I started hanging out with (friend) and she's been there to support me for ages.

8.3.3 Achievement and ability

As well as her friendships, Daisy's art ability (resource characteristic) presents as a protective factor. Her art enables her to explore her appearance and provides her

with opportunity to strengthen her friendships and build her self-esteem thus strengthening her sense of belonging. Daisy thinks she is good at art, she takes time over it, uses it to explore what she could look like and enjoys her friends' responses to it. For example, as she drew her picture of 'belonging' she said,

'I look like one of those really weird chunky doll things. Doesn't look anything like me. That's the good thing about drawing. You can make yourself look like anyone you like,' (Daisy).

Daisy: I absolutely love drawing and I've got quite a few of them but they normally take me quite a while to draw.

Me: So are you good at art?

Daisy: Kind of. Lots of my friends say that I'm one of the best drawers they've ever seen. But the artwork that they see is the ones that take me absolutely ages.

Although Daisy's art serves as a protective factor, within the classroom context Daisy presents it as a potential risk. When speaking about '*not fitting in*,' she raises concern about her comparative achievement in art which seems to challenge her self-belief.

'I fit in with my friends and the art lessons. Even though I got a 'B' in art and people that hate art got A's and the people that like art and do art got B's. It was really confusing,' (Daisy).

An additional resource characteristic featuring in Daisy's and Cathy's interviews is Daisy's intelligence and learning skills. Cathy positively reflected on Daisy's intelligence and the progress she has made since being on medication,

'She's attaining her levels but she might have been even further along because she is so intelligent. She's so bright now she can focus on stuff,' (Cathy).

In contrast, Daisy raised concerns about her own intelligence and its potential impact on secondary school life, '*I don't think I'm going to do very good in secondary because my 8-year-old brother is smarter than me.*'

Their divergent views here are also presented in the next subtheme about Daisy's ADHD diagnosis and the impact of the medication.

8.3.4 Diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Accompanying the person characteristics of *appearance* and *ability*, within the overarching theme of identity, is the diagnosis of ADHD. Here too Cathy and Daisy present divergent views. Cathy perceives the diagnosis to be significant and positive with regard to Daisy's school belonging. She laughed and cried as she recalled the paediatrician diagnosing Daisy with ADHD, indicating that she, herself felt heard and validated,

Cathy: (laughing) I will fight tooth and nail for those kids I kept persevering and we got there and he sat there and he said she has ADHD and I cried.

Me: Did you?

Cathy: Yeah, and it was just like, somebody's actually understood otherwise it's just (crying) ... and the difference it's made in school is amazing.

This excerpt differs from Daisy's who reflects that she does not belong in school regardless of the diagnosis, '*even though I don't fit in it's not because of my diagnosis,*' (Daisy). Daisy identifies that it isn't the diagnosis per se but school behaviour, which is important, because behaviour can impact on friendships. It is friendship which she sees as the most important feature of her school belonging. Daisy is aware that having a diagnosis might change some people's opinion of her but she considers her long-term friendships to be robust and unchanging.

Daisy: Last year I was diagnosed with ADHD, and some people know about that and some don't, and it gives people different opinions of me...There's someone else in the class who has ADHD and he thinks that he can do anything, because of how he acts, because he is a lot less well behaved and my friends say 'yes Daisy has ADHD and is she anything like him? No she isn't'...It doesn't change who you are if you've been diagnosed with it. If you've had friends for three years and then you have ADHD it's not going to change them.

Me: No that's true.

Daisy: It's just a diagnosis

Me: It's just a diagnosis

Although Daisy considers that the diagnosis of ADHD has not changed her, the comments below indicate that the medication has improved her pro social school behaviour. Daisy reflects on a time before she took medication when her behaviour was more similar to the boy's in the previous excerpt and had a negative impact upon her belonging and inclusion both in and out of school.

'Back in Year 3 some of my friends even asked if I had ADHD, because I was like mental, I would run around the classroom, I would like do gymnastics in the classroom, I would scream around and then when I really knew I probably had something was when I was in Brownies. I hated the teachers there, they were horrible to me and they called my parents in one day and said Daisy can't come to camp with us because she is absolutely terrible,' (Daisy).

The impact of the medication features in Cathy's narrative as a noticeable change in Daisy's life, one which school staff noticed.

Me: Did school notice the difference?

Cathy: God, yeah. She had a parent's evening, a report and Mrs (teacher) said to me 'she is like a completely different child this September'.

8.3.5 Fitting In

Both Daisy and the DT define belonging as being part of the world. In both excerpts they use the term 'fitting in' implying a comfortable placement within a group or space.

Me: What do you think belonging is?

Daisy: Fitting in and feeling like you're a part of it. A part of the world...I don't really know how to explain it. Feeling a part of life I guess.

DT: Belonging is having a place in the world. Being important to someone or some people. Being part of a group, fitting in to that group and it being reciprocal.

Throughout Cathy's and Daisy's interview both mention the importance of connection to others. Thus the first subtheme of fitting in is *friendships* which resonates with earlier subthemes of *appearance* and *diagnosis of ADHD*.

8.3.6 Friendships (microsystem of Daisy-school friends)

The protective and healing nature of friendship features throughout Daisy's interview. Indeed, her picture of 'belonging' was of her two of her friends,

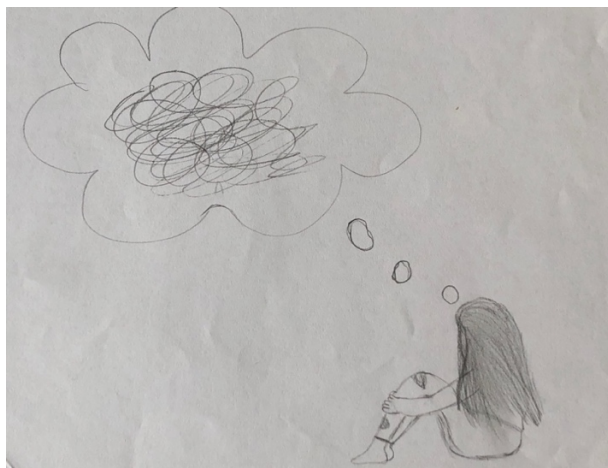
Figure 8.4
Belonging – 'friends'



'I feel like I belong when I've got all of my friends as a support and some of my family...I don't know where I'd be but with my friends in general, anywhere in the world I'd be fine with my friends,' (Daisy).

And the opposite, 'not belonging' for Daisy is 'Unsecure...not feeling that you've got anyone to talk to.' Daisy identified that when difficult or unanticipated events occur within the microsystem of home she seeks out her friends.

Figure 8.5
Not Belonging – 'unsecure' [sic]



Me: So, what did that mean when you didn't have (key adult) but you'd found out that your family was changing?

Daisy: It was ok I guess.

Me: How did you manage?

Daisy: With the help of my friends and I normally just think of other things, not my parents.

Cathy also recognises the importance of friends to Daisy,

Me: And why do you think Daisy chose it (secondary school)?

Cathy: I don't know. Probably because a lot of her friends are going there I think.

Cathy's understanding is accurate and Daisy commented on the importance of maintaining friendships when she goes to secondary school,

Me: So you said earlier that there are people who help you feel like you belong at school. Who are they?

Daisy: (Named three girlfriends), they are my age and I think we are all going to the same school...We're all going to meet up and walk to school together.

8.3.7 Family-school connection (mesosystem)

This subtheme was generated from data signifying the importance of the mesosystem connecting the home-school microsystems to school belonging.

A risk to belonging appears in Daisy's experience at her first primary school. Daisy asked to move from there because members of the community knew about her family and Cathy explained that this meant she felt different to others.

Me: Why do you think she asked to move?

Cathy: Because she wanted to be somewhere where people didn't know.

Cathy: She wanted to be normal.

Me: How successful has that been here? Is there anything about Daisy that affects the way she feels she belongs?

Cathy: It was the best thing I did for her I think because she didn't get the conversations about her mum and all the people that knew everything.

Despite Daisy's move, her home situation continues to make her feel different from others, 'Some people know that I live with my nan and they look at me differently because it's weird'. This reflects that in some situations the home-school connection can act against school belonging. Daisy's desire for anonymity goes against comments made by Cathy and the DT who actively seek knowledge about the child's home context as a way to help children to belong.

'As a teacher, I was interested in them (children), curious about them, knowing about them. And I've tried to push this about the parents as well because some teachers do feel that I don't need to know all of that background and I keep saying 'knowledge is power'...you influence using that. I ask questions a lot and then I try and use that to make the child feel like they belong.' (DT)

In her current school, knowledge of the past appears to partially support Daisy's belonging. For example, Devyn and her brother attended the same school when they were children, which enables Cathy to reassure Daisy that people at the school understand her, it also helps her to discuss Devyn with Daisy in a more positive light.

Me: You've talked about relationships and you've talked about your own children coming here, does Daisy know that your children came to the school?

Cathy: Yes, there is a picture over in the hallway and it's got my children in it and I've shown her that (previous Head Teacher) taught Devyn which is quite nice because I was able to say to Daisy. she actually taught your mum which, because we do talk about her, not an awful lot, but we do talk about stuff that she does.

Cathy's comments above indicate the importance she places on the school as part of their family narrative. She reinforces this in the next excerpt when she reports the current head teacher's reticence towards reading Daisy's file when she transferred to the school.

I said to her they're under SGOs I would appreciate it if you would read their records, find out exactly what went on because I think it's important that you know their history and how traumatic it was. She promised me she would...it turned out that not only had she not read the paperwork, it wasn't even in the school,' (Cathy).

By not reading the file, the head teacher seems to have weakened the family-school connection which is significant to Daisy's belonging. Particularly because Cathy relies on staff to support Daisy's well-being when things become difficult at home.

'I'm not the best mum in the world and I shout and ball at her and I lose my temper with her and I've done lots of things wrong but I need her to know that she can come to school and tell somebody and I know she does because it's recorded on the CPOMs,' (Cathy).

8.3.8 School process of transition (changing emphasis across the school microsystems, mesosystem factors)

Both Cathy and Daisy indicate that school interventions have enabled Daisy being able to develop her relationships with key adults. Cathy described several staff members with whom both she and Daisy have formed strong relationships, describing them as *'amazing, absolutely brilliant.'* Cathy considers school as a place where Daisy can talk to an adult, and below, she associates this idea with the concepts of trust and safety.

'I think you need to have a connection with someone or something, because you can't go through life not being connected to anything. You can't... She feels safe here in school, she trusts the teachers, most of them,' (Cathy).

Although Daisy and Cathy concur that a key adult relationship is helpful, Cathy seems unsure about how to manage the end of the relationship as Daisy transitions between schools. Cathy has requested that the relationship stops before Daisy leaves Year 6, which presents a potential obstacle to Daisy's belonging, *'I want it (support) gone by Easter because she needs a whole term free to see whether she's going to cope with it before she goes to big school.'*

'She (teaching assistant) was a Thrive member and I used to come and see her. I don't anymore. I stopped seeing her. I think it's cos I don't need to see her anymore because school think I'm doing ok. I think I am myself as well,' (Daisy).

Cathy's decision to withdraw Daisy's support is two-fold; firstly it is influenced by Daisy's comments about feeling different at school because of her home-life, and secondly by conversations with the secondary school SENCo. Hence, the *school process of transition* and *family-school connection* merge. Cathy indicates

ambivalence about Daisy's support requirements in secondary school, perhaps underpinned by a limited understanding of the long-term risks associated with childhood neglect and abuse.

'I don't want her going to big school and having it all stripped away because then she won't cope so what they've said is that everything will be there ready if and when she needs it but they said it might be better to just let her go in without all of the additional stuff so she'll settle better, because then people aren't going to be thinking 'Why is she...?' Again it's that normality which I agree I thought that was good. I want the school to do as much as possible,' (Cathy).

The watchful waiting approach of the secondary school SENCOs is different to the DT's who seems to recognise that Daisy may require support and that Cathy too benefits from a close *family-school connection*.

'Cathy needs contact so we've sorted that and we've been emailing back and forth, back and forth and it was good in the end to get all three of them (secondary SENCOs) copied in on the emails, because I feel that the level of anxiety is important and they can either roll their eyes at it and face the consequences or they can listen to it and be proactive and get to know Daisy and Cathy and hit the ground running,' (DT).

The DT's action in the transition is based on her understanding of special guardianship and her personal belief in the legacy of need existing within the family.

'I don't want to say 'she'll be fine' because I think it's going to be really hard. Poor Cathy, the whole way along it comes back to the fact that they are special guardianship and the same person who brought up Devyn and there are skills that she needs to be better at and she is battling against that all the time,'(DT).

8.4 Conclusion

This case highlights the importance of fitting in and not feeling different to others. Daisy's friendships enable this in her primary school and, she anticipates, in her

secondary school. Daisy's person characteristics are influential, specifically her ability to reflect, her appearance and her strengths in art. The relationships Daisy has had with adults has supported her belonging. The influences on school belonging of the diagnosis of ADHD, strong home-school connection and information sharing over time are perceived differently between Cathy, the DT and Daisy.

Chapter 9: Leah

Data from three semi-structured interviews contribute to this case: Leah's, her guardian's Anne and Peter, and the SENCo's. Anne and Peter are unrelated to Leah but previously fostered Leah's father, John, for 10 years. The interviews with Leah and her guardians were held in their home. I had arranged to interview the DT but the SENCo met me instead explaining that the DT is her line manager and together they had decided that she should meet me because she has '*a lot to do with Leah through SEN reviews,*' (SEnCo).

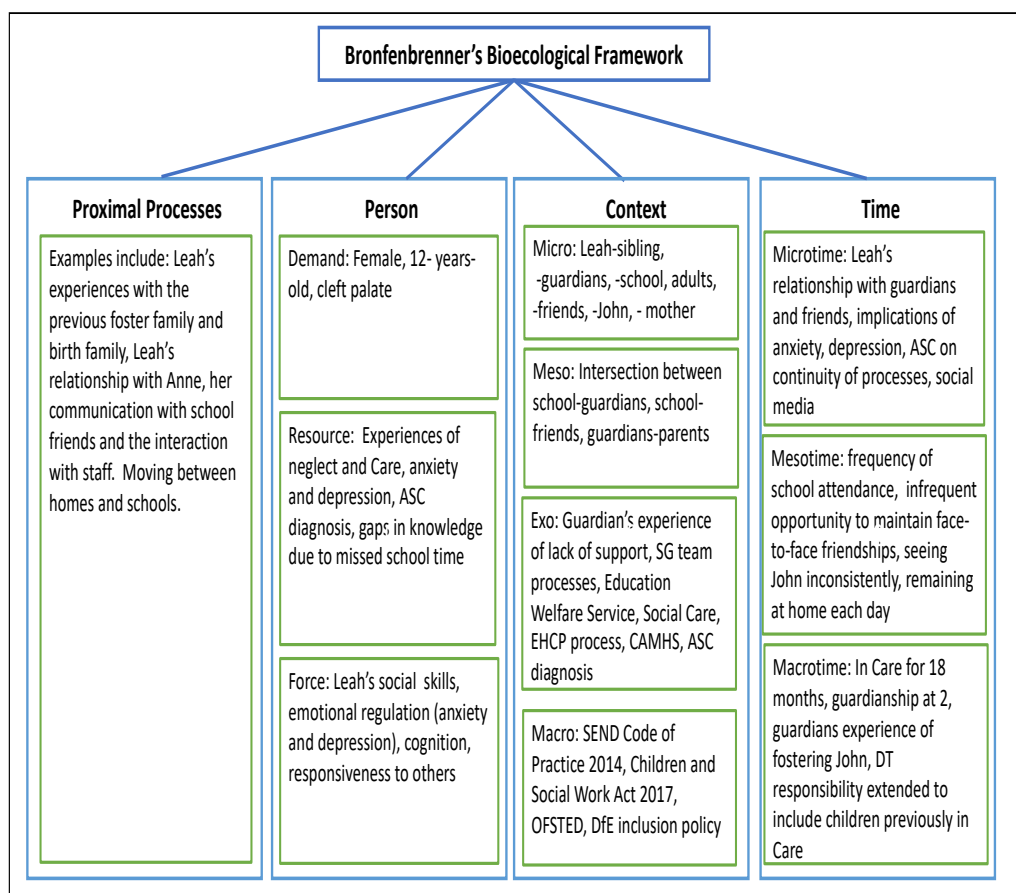
The case will be presented by describing Leah's school and family contexts and mapping them onto Bronfenbrenner's PPCT framework (1999), (Figures 9.1 & 9.2) before considering the overarching and subthemes generated from the data (Figure 9.3).

9.1 School context

Leah is 12 years-old, in Year 8 at a mainstream secondary school. Leah previously attended one primary school. Her attendance in Year 6 was low and in Year 7, it was 72%. She is now on a part-time timetable of 2 hours per week. However, Leah rarely attends and this is having a detrimental impact on her school belonging. When asked about her feelings of school belonging Leah said,

'I don't feel like I belong at (school's name) at all because I am not getting what I need. School aren't giving it to me and I have nothing else to do with myself. I am usually at home watching Netflix and I want to be at school working,' (Leah).

Figure 9.1 Bronfenbrenner’s PPCT Framework (1999) with Elements of Leah’s Life



9.2 Leah’s family context

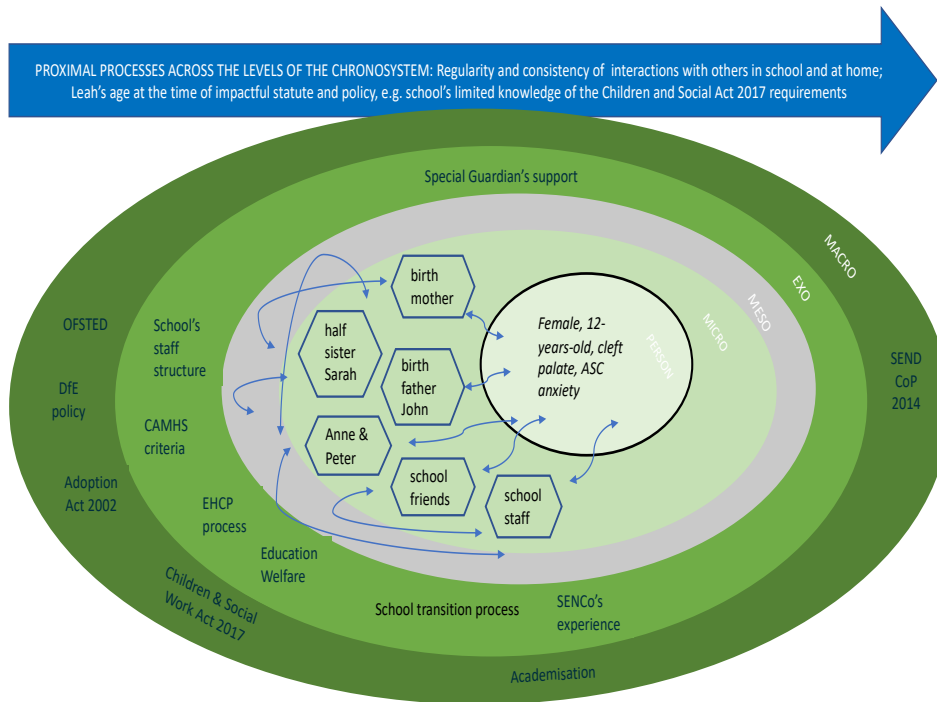
Leah lives with Anne and Peter, her half-sister Sarah, a foster child (16 years), an adult Anne and Peter had previously fostered (25 years) and their 18-year-old granddaughter. Anne and Peter’s biological daughters live with their own families in extensions connected to the house. Anne and Peter’s biological and foster children previously attended the same secondary school as Leah.

Anne described Leah’s parents as ‘*very inadequate*,’ which led to Leah and Sarah being placed in care. Leah and Sarah lived with a foster family for 18 months before moving to live with Anne and Peter, when they were 2 and 5 years-old. Anne and Peter requested guardianship because they ‘*felt it was important that the girls had contact with John*.’ Anne and Peter were ‘*not given the option of fostering them*,’ (Peter). Over the years, the relationship between Anne, Peter and Leah’s mother has

been stable ‘*she sees the girls every 6 week,*’ (Anne), whereas with John it is inconsistent and they have recently argued and are not in contact.

Figure 9.2

Bronfenbrenner’s PPCT Framework (1999) Mapping Elements of Leah’s Life



9.3 Themes

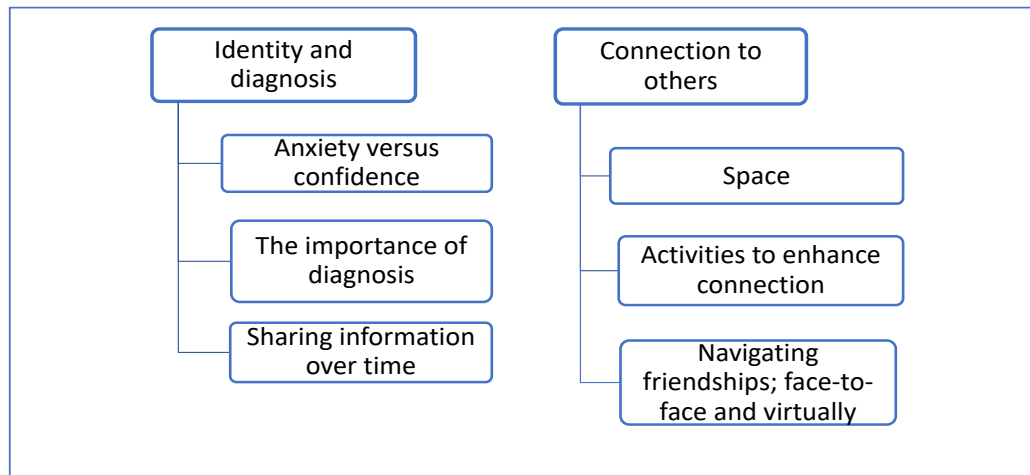
The overarching themes generated from the data were *identity and diagnoses* and *connection to others*. Each of these themes are constructed from subthemes (Figure 9.3).

9.3.1 Identity and diagnosis

An overarching theme of school belonging generated from the data is *identity and diagnoses*. In all interviews a dominant theme was within-child factors and their impact on school belong. Identity and diagnoses was generated from the subthemes of: *anxiety and confidence, the importance of diagnosis and sharing information over time*.

Figure 9.3

Table of Leah's Overarching and Subthemes Generated from the Case Data



9.3.2 Anxiety versus confidence (person)

Sitting within the overarching theme of identity and diagnoses are key person characteristics relate to Leah's *anxiety* and *confidence*.

Leah presented the anxious person characteristic as her authentic self (*'real me'*) and contrasts this with confidence, *'the real me is not happy, they're depressed, sad and unhappy all the time unfortunately. The confident me is fine, pretends I have no anxiety,'* (Leah). Leah suggested that her feelings of anxiety prevent her from attending school which impacts negatively upon belonging there, *'My anxiety stops me from going in, so it stops me from feeling like I belong there.'*

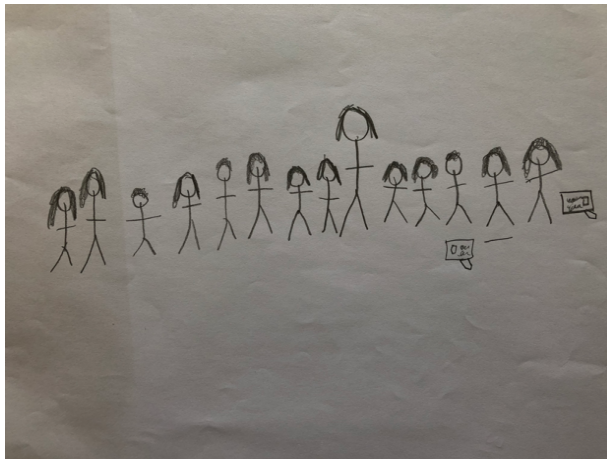
Leah's anxiety has developed over time and has not always been an obstacle to school belonging. In the 'belonging' picture she reflected on an event in her primary school,

'This is when I got my bronze award at my primary school...and when I got my bronze it was really fun because it was in front of the whole school and that was before I knew anything about my anxiety...so I actually felt really good,' (Leah).

Currently though, anxiety seems to be a particularly entrenched characteristic of her adolescent development, which is having a catastrophic impact upon her school attendance reducing her sense of school belonging. For example, Leah's menstruation heightens her feelings of anxiety and at these times she will not go into school.

Figure 9.4

Belonging – 'getting my bronze'



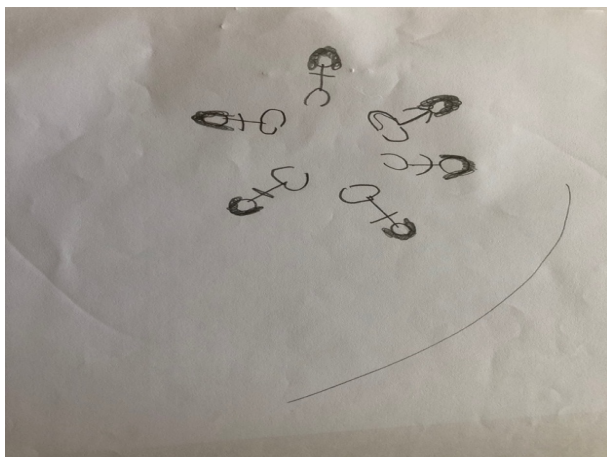
Leah: I go in on Fridays apart from when I have my period and I will not go into school at all.

Me: Is there a reason for that?

Leah: Anxiety. I have a fear of leaking, fear of smell. I don't want them to know I'm on it because then they'll be weird...Mine are heavy so I really need to stay home...I have a phobia of using school toilets and public places.

Figure 9.5

Not Belonging – 'lower field'



Leah's anxious self or the 'real me' is juxtaposed with her 'confident side.' Her confident behaviour is something which Leah can choose to show others if required. Leah explained that her 'confident side' is problematic because when she uses it at school, it conceals her needs and limits the help she is offered.

'I have the confident me and I have the real me, which is a complete mess. So I show people who I really know the real me, and people who I'm just going to see like you...I would pretend to be happy and fine. Whereas in school when I'm talking to people to see if I can get myself an education, I'm being confident and they are saying that I don't look like I have anything wrong with me and therefore they can't do anything for me,' (Leah).

'Granny told me that 'your confident face does not work in your favour,' (Leah).

Despite the existence of her 'confident side,' Leah has begun to identify anxiety as central to her identity, *'I am someone with severe anxiety with issues at home and school, so I'm not getting anywhere in life,' (Leah).* The possibility of going to a different educational provision has been raised, assuming that Leah would attend, thereby increasing her school time and decreasing time at home will improve her sense of school belonging, but again Leah presented her feelings of anxiety as an obstacle to this, *'I'll be very anxious about the first day, I probably wouldn't even get myself to go because of my anxiety,' (Leah).* Hence, Leah's understanding of her *anxiety and confidence* are influential in maintaining the current situation and a low level of school belonging.

9.3.3 The importance of diagnosis

This subtheme was generated as a result of the guardian's and SENCo's shared focus on identifying the cause of Leah's social and emotional response to the school environment. Both consider Leah's sense of belonging to rely on an accurate identification of her needs so that effective intervention can be put in place which will enable her to attend and reconnect with school life. However, the guardians and the SENCos hold different views of the cause of Leah's anxiety. The SENCo considers that Leah's early relational experiences underpin her anxiety in school, suggesting medication to reduce it so that Leah can return to school,

'What we were seeing was attachment issues. The EP she was taken to thought it was attachment though she wouldn't see him so it was based on description,' (SENCo).

'Apparently, she says she wants to be here but she can't because of her anxiety and I've said to Anne that we have children who are medicated...if a child is so highly anxious and can't move forward and can't engage with therapy then surely you've got to do something?' (SENCo).

Although, Anne and Peter concede that Leah's needs are partly caused by her early life experiences, they believe Leah experiences autism. After a first assessment, several years ago, which did not lead to a diagnosis, a second, more recent one did. Anne and Peter describe their challenge in obtaining the diagnosis because of Leah's early experiences,

'They kept saying it's severe attachment disorder and we kept saying it was more than that. We think she has got some sort of autism...They would not have it. They said, 'no you can't have both.'" Eventually about 3 or 4 months ago the SGO team put her in for another ASC assessment and they said, 'yes she does have it.'" (Anne)

Despite the formal diagnosis, the SENCo doubts its accuracy based on Leah's behaviour in school, which means she is reluctant to put in interventions to support it.

'Granny started to go on about autism but we were not seeing any signs of that and we do know about how it manifests differently with girls.' (SENCo)

'She (Leah) was chatty, articulate, analysing her own feelings, so we have not seen the autistic signs there at all.' (SENCo)

9.3.4 Sharing information over time (mesosystem and mesotime between schools and between home and school)

This subtheme relates to the narrative about Leah's experiences of school belonging over time and the relevance of proximal processes involved in information sharing between the schools at transition and within her secondary school.

Anne explained that at her primary school, Leah behaved well until she got home when she would hit and hurt others. Anne believed she understood this behaviour and described staff's response when she tried to share this information with them.

'The SENCo would not have it that these things came from school...what she'd done, 'cos she is hypersensitive and hypervigilant, is she'd gather all this information and then it would come out when she got home because she couldn't hold on to it...sometimes she was really angry and I was black and blue,' (Anne).

The diverging views between the guardians and staff about Leah's needs led to her reduced sense of school belonging over time, and by the end of Year 6, Leah's attendance was sporadic. This weakened the transition process from her primary to secondary school and important information was not shared.

'They (primary school staff) told them (secondary school staff) she'd had Thrive and got sensory issues but they didn't realise the extent of it, I mean I did tell them.'
(Anne)

'Anne said that Leah was coming here and...she'd be fine at school, good student etc. but now we're told that she wasn't fine there,' (SENCo)

The process of *information sharing* between and within contexts has influenced the interventions put in place by staff to support her over the course of Leah's school life. Without a coherent understanding of her *identity and diagnosis* inappropriate interventions have been put in place. Leah was initially an *'attendance issue...I was called in because there was a query about special needs,'* (SENCo).

More recently, in an effort to improve how information about Leah is shared between the guardians and school staff, a series of meetings have been held. However, these have not had the expected impact, *'we have had meeting after meeting and basically we are nowhere,'* (Anne) and Leah's sense of belonging remains low.

9.3.5 Connection to others

The second overarching theme is *connecting to people and places*. It consists of the subthemes *space, activities to enhance connection and navigating friendships; face-to-face and virtually*.

9.3.6 Space (proximal process within the Leah-school microsystem)

Physical spaces within the school grounds were identified by Leah and the SENCo as important to *connection* with others. Although Leah drew a school space in her picture of 'not belonging' she spoke positively of being there with others '*this is the lower field where everyone sits dotted around chatting...it's really great.*' In addition to the lower field, both Leah and the SENCo agreed that the library is where children feel connected,

'The library is quiet, I can focus...I can get a laptop because there are fact books around me...the librarians are nice. There is a shop where we can buy stationary in the cafeteria there is a vending machine for snacks,' (Leah).

'The library is an inclusive hub, every lunchtime you'll see droves of children going in there...it's a really lovely atmosphere,' (SENCo).

Other physical characteristics of the school were identified by Leah and the SENCo as influential to feelings of school belonging. For example the overall size of the school was identified as problematic '*this school is so big – how do kids get a sense of belonging and being valued?*' (SENCo).

As well as size, the layout of the school is relevant because it is split across two sites. The SENCo raised this as a '*thing that militates against belonging*' because of its impact upon the '*the cohesion of the tutor group...students don't get their tutor every morning...they see their tutor once per week.*' Next year, Leah will be taught on a different, larger site and the SENCo expressed apprehension about this, '*with a few of our students with SEN they don't cope with the transition to Year 9; a bigger site, bigger in numbers, so the corridors are more crowded,*' (SENCo).

In contrast to the SENCo's concerns Leah spoke more hopefully of being on a larger, unfamiliar site, *'In Year 9 the school is on a different campus and I get intimidated by all the people, so I might not do so well in the beginning but I am hoping I will warm up to it.'* (Leah). In view of Leah's current attendance and the points raised in the subtheme of *anxiety and confidence*, the SENCo's view might be more realistic.

9.3.7 Activities to enhance connection (proximal processes which impact the Leah-school and Leah-friendship microsystems)

The SENCo suggested that the school relies upon the development of relationships between pupils and key adults in school to promote a sense of belonging. She described the teaching assistants and the home/school liaison officers in the school as *'particularly outstanding,' 'incredible' and 'fantastic.'* Leah's limited attendance and the split site layout has reduced the opportunity to develop a relationship. Indeed, neither Leah nor her guardians mention any specific staff member as influential to their belonging.

Other school activities to promote belonging is through extracurricular clubs, *'computer club...our PE department is very active, there are lots of things that happen after school, surfing, kayaking, the climbing wall...we have the film club...'* (SENCo). However all of these activities are school-based and therefore inaccessible to Leah whilst her timetable is limited to 2 hours per week.

'They have made no provision for her because it isn't dependable that she will be there they won't make provision; they won't have something ready so that if she does come in they can grab it and do it. She goes in and they say 'what can we do with you? There is nobody available or nothing provided,' (Peter).

Indeed, the staff appear to be unresponsive when Leah attends. The SENCo explained a flawed communication system for the guardians to let them know that Leah is attending on Friday morning, which is reliant on an email being read by the Head of Year 8 *'Anne would email the Year Head but she wouldn't always have picked it up...so Leah would just turn up.'* (SENCo)

9.3.8 Navigating friendships; face-to-face and virtually (microsystem of Leah-friends)

The SENCo defined belonging in relation to others '*being part of something, being appreciated, accepted,*' which mirrors Leah's reference to the influence of peer relationships on school belonging,

'If you are not feeling supported by your friends you do not feel like you belong. Friends are a big factor of school and belonging. When you are in school you want people to laugh with, people to help you, whereas if you don't have any friends you can't laugh with people, you can't ask for help. I'm most of the time just alone.'
(Leah)

Anne concurred with Leah's perspective explaining that Leah is '*always on the periphery,*' of friendships and rather than describing friendships as a fluid series of proximal processes, she placed emphasis on Leah's fixed, person characteristics, '*She can't do friendships. She is not good at them at all and she was desperate to fit in,*' (Anne).

Friendship featured in much of Leah's narrative about belonging and in her interview she used several adjectives indicating a taxonomy of friend types rather than qualities within friendship, e.g. best, fake, good, acting, proper, normal and real. For example, she said, '*No one really wants to be my friend, a proper friend, they just want to be normal friends.*' (Leah)

Despite Leah's comments of being alone, her connection to one particular boy seems to impact upon her school belonging, influencing her decision to go to school or to stay away,

'She says 'the only thing that helps me to belong in school is Josh.'" (Anne)

'I won't go in unless he is there because he sticks up for me when other people are calling me skiver.' (Leah)

As well as meeting Josh when she attends Leah maintains connection with other peers through social media. However, her use of it maintains her peripheral position by informing her of activities to which she is not invited or included, thus reducing her connection to them.

'There is one group on my What's App that is about 12 of us...I am the person who reads and does not type so I am the secret one. So they don't know that I know what they are doing' (Leah).

Leah: My friends are just not good friends; they recently had a sleepover and I wasn't invited. All of my friends were there.'

Me: Do you know why they didn't invite you?

Leah: Probably because they didn't think I was going to go because usually I'm not at school that's why they would think I wouldn't want to go.

Although Leah made many unfavourable references to her friendships, they seem to be central to her sense of school belonging, *'I don't want to move schools because then I will feel like I don't belong because I'll be a new student with no friends there,'* (Leah). Her connection with school friends provides her with a tentative link to the school but it also presents an obstacle to her motivation to move to a different school where she might potentially be able to develop a stronger sense of school belonging.

9.4 Conclusion

Leah's identity is strongly influenced by the diagnoses of anxiety, depression and ASC. Although Leah's needs are recognised by the SEN process in school, rather than reliant on the DT's role, the diverging views about the cause of her needs mean that accurate and helpful interventions are not put in place and this impacts her feelings of school belonging.

Her guardians do not feel that staff understand her needs which has led to them feeling frustrated and misunderstood which has reduced their trust and communication and influenced Leah's school belonging.

Leah's friendship with one boy is intense but represents a protective factor, her other friendships are maintained through social media, but have the potential to further reducing Leah's sense of school belonging. Leah is able to reflect on times when she felt more confident and less anxious in her primary school which she relates to school belonging.

Chapter 10: Adam

Data from three semi-structured interviews contribute to this case: Adam's (10-years-old), his guardians' (Jenny and Tom) and the DT's. Adam is unrelated to Jenny and Tom, he was their first foster child, placed with them when he was 3-years-old. Three years later they successfully applied for a SGO.

Each interview took place in Adam's primary school. The case will be presented by describing Adam's school and family contexts and mapping them onto Bronfenbrenner's PPCT framework (1999) (Figures 10.1 & 10.2) before considering the overarching and subthemes generated from the data, (Figure 10.3).

10.1 School context

Adam is in Year 5 of his local mainstream school. Before living with Jenny, Adam attended '*tons of preschools*' with his mother, who was supported by Social Care. In the early days of his placement in care with Jenny and Tom, Adam continued to move between preschools under the advice of Social Care. Jenny explained that this has been motivated her to keep Adam in the same school until the end of Year 6.

Whilst Adam has been at the school the management there has changed considerably; when he first started it was a local authority maintained school, it then became part of a multi academy trust. Then, following an OFSTED rating of 'Requires Improvement,' the school changed to a different academy. These systemic changes have had an impact on Adam, in terms of the stability of relationships he has with adults in the school. In the last two years, 50% of the staff have left. Jenny described staff mobility as '*shocking*.' Jenny mentioned '*a lovely headteacher last year who just started making a difference and then he left and Adam did really like him so that was quite a wobbly thing*,' (Jenny).

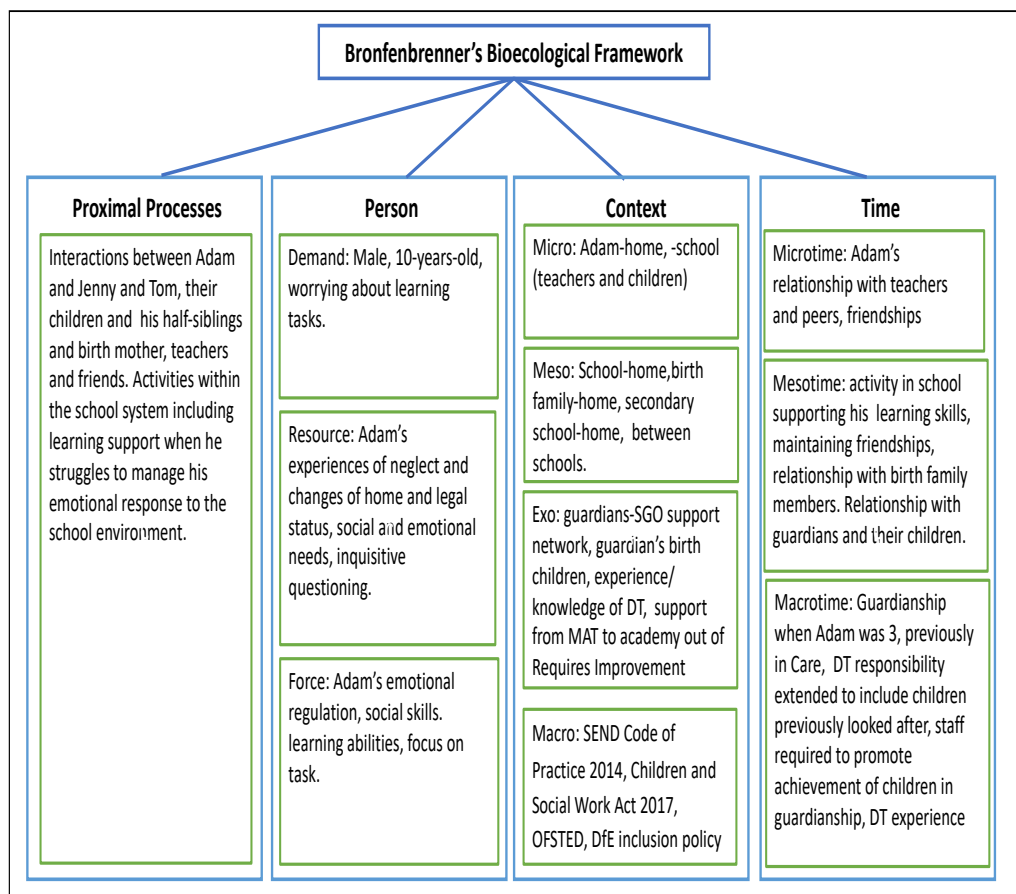
The SENCo has changed three times since Adam has been there. The DT described the staff group as 'going through a journey' following the OFSTED result. Staff mobility has had an impact on the process the school has used to identify and meet

Adam’s needs. Adam had previously had a Statement of Special Educational Needs but the school ‘*just let it lapse,*’ (Jenny).

The current DT started working at the school a year ago, she is also the SENCo. She is new to the role having previously worked in another school within the academy as a class teacher. She has nearly completed the SENCo national award but she has not received any specific training on the role of DT.

Figure 10.1

Bronfenbrenner’s PPCT Framework (1999) with Elements of Adam’s Life



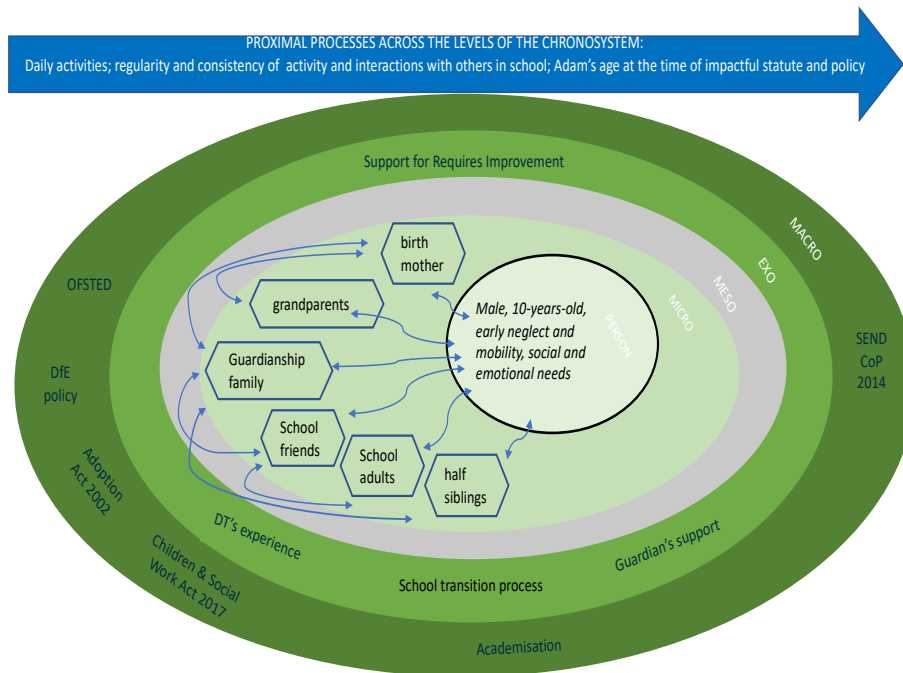
10.2 Adam’s family

Adam and his baby half-brother, Ewan (10-months-old), live in guardianship with Jenny, her husband, Tom, and their three biological daughters, the youngest of whom is 13-years-old, the older two attend University. Adam was placed with Jenny

and Tom when he was 3-years-old. When talking about her feelings for Adam, Jenny said, *'I couldn't love him more and obviously now we have his brother,'* (Jenny)

Figure 10.2

Bronfenbrenner's PPCT Framework (1999) Mapping Elements of Adam's Life



At birth Adam lived with his mum in a mother and baby foster placement. Adam's mum experiences mental health difficulties and is addicted to drugs. Jenny explained that Adam and his mum moved home approximately 7 times before he was placed with her family. In the last few years Adam's father took his own life. Adam's father's family are not in contact with him.

Adam's mum has had three other children, each with different fathers. As well as baby Ewan, Adam has two younger half-sisters; one of them lives with Adam's maternal grandmother and the other with her paternal grandmother. Adam stays at his maternal grandparents with one of his half-sisters once per month. Jenny explained that neither of Adam's grandparents *'could cope with Adam's behaviour,*

so he went into care and came to us and then, it sounds really brutal, but he was a boy at an age of certain behaviours and nobody wanted to adopt him.’ Adam has lunch with his mother four times per year accompanied by Jenny, Tom and their younger daughter.

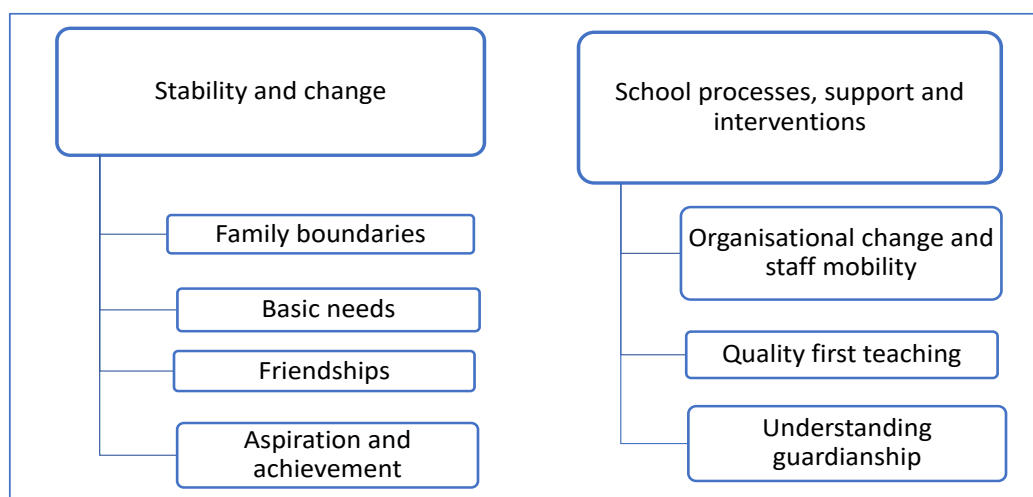
Jenny considers the current situation to be stable and supportive of Adam but she also describes how painful the placement decisions have been for him in the past. Jenny said that she has heard Adam say ‘the family keep the girls and the boys are sort of...(unfinished), (Jenny).

10.3 Themes

The overarching themes generated from the data are *stability and change* and *school processes, support and interventions*. Each of these themes are constructed from subthemes (Figure 10.3).

Figure 10.3

Table of Adam’s Overarching and Subthemes Generated from the Case Data



10.3.1 Stability and change

An overarching theme of school belonging generated from the data is *stability and change*. This theme developed from the subthemes of: *family boundaries, basic*

needs, friendships and aspiration and achievement. These were generated mainly from information about the proximal processes in Adam's school and family microsystems.

10.3.2 Family boundaries (microsystems of home-Adam, birth family-Adam)

The first subtheme was generated from the concept of family which featured heavily in both Adam and Jenny's responses when asked to define belonging. In Adam's belonging picture he drew the house he lives in with his guardianship family, using the word '*home*'. Adam also mentioned his half-siblings which suggests that he considers them too as important within his concept of belonging, despite them not living with him.

Below, Adam presents a relatively polarised view of belonging within the boundary of family. He includes his guardianship family and some members of his birth family as fundamental to his sense of belonging but positions his birth mother in contrast. Adam's picture of '*not belonging*' was his mum's flat (Figure 10.5). He drew this picture carefully and in detail.

Figure 10.4

Belonging – 'my house'



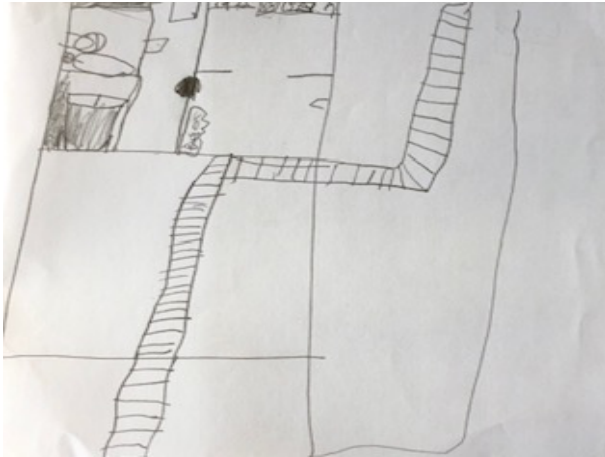
Adam: So I'm just going to put my house probably.

Me: And who lives in that house with you?

Adam: Me and outside rabbits, a cat inside. Jenny, Tom, Charlie, Bella, Flora, the baby but they're not always there. Some are at University. I've got my other two sisters. One lives with the other person who joined up with my mum and his mum. My sister lives with my gran.

Figure 10.5

Not Belonging – ‘mum’s place’



Adam: And now I'll probably draw my mum's place actually.

Me: Where you don't belong?

Adam: Yes. A flat. I think she lives in a flat still. She used to live in (local town) flat but now she lives in (another town).

Me: Have you been there?

Adam: Yes. Like twice or three times.

In addition to who he regards as his family, Adam also spoke about the importance of knowing what family members are doing as influential to his general sense of belonging,

Me: And tell me what do you think belonging means?

Adam: It means that you're a part of a family and you don't belong without them, without knowing what they are doing.

Me: And how does that feel?

Adam: Better than not being part of a family. Better than living with my mum which wouldn't be very nice.

Both Jenny and Adam concur in their narrative of the importance of family in promoting belonging. Below Jenny conveys how painful she has found it to witness and be part of Adam's life experiences. For Adam change has been a constant factor and Jenny expresses a concern about the impact of this on Adam's expectations of stability and permanence.

Jenny: But yes I think he does belong to a lot of different things but you can imagine that he thinks that at any time he's just going to be picked up and told 'right this is your new family and you've got to belong here now' (crying).

Me: Do you think that is his worry?

Jenny: I think if you told him it, although he'd be aghast, he wouldn't be surprised. He wouldn't want it to happen but he might say 'yes I've been waiting for this...'

Me: Because it's happened before.

Jenny: Yes.

As Jenny spoke about the possibility of Adam leaving her family she wept. In the moment this seemed to be from a sense of sadness and despair about Adam's experiences and their impact on his sense of belonging. She presented a basic assumption that for most belonging is associated with stability which provides comfort and feelings of safety, but suggests that this is not the case for Adam.

I just think that a sense of belonging is just a sense of 'this is what it is' isn't it (crying, pause)? You don't really think about it, it's just 'I belong here, this is my life and I try to belong and I do this and I do that and I don't mind if somethings are a bit different because fundamentally everything is okay'. I don't think he has that sense of taking everything for granted and it will all turn out okay in the end. I don't think he has that at all,' (Jenny).

10.3.3 Basic needs (proximal processes within the home-Adam, mother-Adam microsystem)

The second subtheme within *stability and change* is *basic needs*. Adam's pictures and narrative indicate that for him belonging connects to his basic needs, such as shelter, care and food. In his 'belonging' picture he drew features of the house he lives in with his family and associated it with factors like siblings, playing in the attic, inside and outside pets. He spoke about the availability of food he likes to eat. In his 'not belonging' picture of his mother's flat he drew '*all the rubbish, because she used to keep loads of sweet wrappers and biscuits beside her bed. Once I had a look and it was really bad.*' Adam told me about a salient event reflecting ambivalent feelings towards his mother and her circumstances.

Once I went around with a £5 note and I wanted her to have it because she doesn't have a job and she found it and she was going to give it back and then she didn't. I don't really mind. This is the kitchen (points to 'not belonging' picture). I drew a £5 note and put it behind that. I said I was going to hide something and I asked her to

close her eyes and then I hid it and she never found it, except she had found it.

(Adam)

Food is a second basic need underpinning Adam's sense of belonging. Both Jenny and Adam include food as a factor of emotional significance to Adam.

'And the other day he was worried the baby was going to eat all the food because he was starved and he has this underlying worry about food,' (Jenny).

Adam spoke disparagingly about the food his mum offers him in the flat, *'She tries to give me curry stuff. It's weird.'* In contrast, he spoke positively about food he eats at school because it tastes similar to the meals he eats at home.

Me: What else helps you be a 4 in belonging here?

Adam: The food it tastes good like sometimes when I'm at home. Like chips, cod with batter on it. My mum's cauliflower and broccoli cheese.

Linked to the type of food available are the mealtimes which provide Adam with the opportunity to develop his relationships with friends or close family members to strengthen his feelings of belonging.

They [children who rate school belonging at '4'] eat the food they like and have the same as they do at home. They eat in the hall and sit next to their friends and talk about gaming and stuff. They do macaroni cheese here! (Adam).

I'm going to Pizza Hut for tea which I don't do very often and then I'm going to do this athletics club in (local town). It's not a treat that I am doing the club but Pizza Hut is cos my dad's got a voucher. Just me and my dad. He only takes me. (Adam)

Adam's experiences of relationships also feature strongly in the following subtheme of *friendships*.

10.3.4 Friendships (proximal processes within the friends-Adam microsystem)

Friendships feature strongly in Adam's narrative, he considers himself to have a relatively large group of friends and enjoys it when school friends visit his house and stay the night because it deepens their understanding of each other,

Me: Why in this school do you feel like belong at '4'?

Adam: Because I'm with my friends. Eight are coming to my sleepover so I've got about seven friends...The last one was like at least two months ago.

Me: Do you enjoy having them over for sleepovers? Does it affect your relationship with them?

Adam: Yes.

Me: In what way?

Adam: Like, they know what I like and what I don't like and stuff like that.

The function of friendships serves to increase Adam's experiences and understanding of what happens in others' lives, perhaps exposing him to family and life experiences with less adversity, which gives him the opportunity to connect with others through positive shared experiences. For example, Jenny spoke about his friends having babies in their families,

Two of his friends, one of his particular friends in the Year 5 class, their mothers have just had babies so a sense of belonging to the baby club! They are all big brothers now so...(unfinished), (Jenny)

Jenny considers that Adam's early life and current contact with his birth family has had an important role in how he socialises with others. He expects others to be as open about their experiences as he has had to be in the past. He ask others details about their home lives and tells them aspects of his life which most might consider to be too personal to share. This was apparent within the course of Adam's interview when he asked me about my life and who I live with, '*What are you doing after school today?*' '*Do you live your mum and dad?*' '*Do you see them though?*' Adam also told me about other children in the school who have experienced similar life events as him.

Me: So, how do you know you aren't the only one who lives with someone other than their parents?

Adam: Well, they've told...one lives with their mum and their dad's dead like me. I think the other one lives with her foster mum but I don't know if it is her real mum or not.

Both Jenny and the DT show concern about how Adam shares his life experiences with others and raised examples of when they have acted to mediate his relationships in an effort to protect him by prewarning others or normalising his narrative,

So, he went around to this new friends house, not a new friend anymore and I told them that he is under special guardianship but he still sees his mum and he very clearly quite quickly told them that his father was dead. Good job I warned them then isn't it! (Jenny)

Yesterday I was at the zoo with him and Adam was saying his dad is picking him up and the other boy said, 'I thought your dad died?' And Adam said, 'it's not my real dad, my real dad died, but I mean my dad who I live with,' and he was very matter-of-fact about it and open and the boy obviously was interested in it and he said, 'don't you only see your mum once every three months or something?' And then Adam said 'yeah, yeah, yeah, I have two mums' and I came in and I said, 'it's like me, I have my dad, he's my biological dad and I also have another dad who helped bring me up' and the boy said, 'oh right' and Adam said 'exactly, I'm like that'. (DT)

10.3.5 Aspiration and achievement (proximal processes within school-Adam and home-Adam microsystems)

The change in proximal processes within Adam's life has been increasingly positive, there is more aspiration and higher expectation of school achievement within Adam's guardianship family. Jenny describes her daughters' experiences as providing a template for Adam to belong within school and the wider community,

And the good thing is that because we have so many older children he has things mapped out, like he went to Beavers and Cubs and our 19-year-old, who has just gone off to university, she went to Scouts and Explorers so he can see that this is what he will be doing that there is a future all sort of planned out and that people go and they come back and all the rest of it. (Jenny)

Although, Jenny acknowledges that her daughter's experiences and perception of school are different than Adam's she encourages him to make progress nonetheless.

Me: Does he talk about school at home?

Jenny: No he hates school except he doesn't, it's really very confusing. To try and get him...we're grinding him down over the years but if you say 'you need to practice your spellings you've got a spelling test on Friday', he'll just hit the roof in seconds, he'll be furious about it and you just sit there and sometimes you say 'well fine don't then and how are you going to feel on Friday when you can't do any of them?' and then he will sit down and do them.

Whilst Jenny encourages Adam's school progress, she feels frustration that staff are less supportive of him, she suggests that his apparent *friendships* mask his emotional response to learning, and therefore staff do not provide him with the support she thinks he needs to make progress there. This connects with the subtheme *quality first teaching* which is a subtheme within the second overarching theme of school processes, support and intervention.

I mean this is one of the things I struggle with at school because to all intents and purposes he is a really happy little boy, he has lots of friends he goes to cubs, he goes to athletics club he goes around to friends' houses for tea and he comes home,' (Jenny).

Jenny explained that even though staff might notice that Adam responds well to some specific classroom practice, e.g. predictability, they do not understand why this might be the case,

Me: Do you think they make other adaptations for him at the school to help him feel like he belongs and connect?

Jenny: I don't really because I think they think he's okay. I have tried so hard to explain that he is not okay and they say, 'oh he's fine'. He is very, very anxious and his teacher did, a few weeks ago say, 'he always likes to know what we're doing next' and I thought yes that's anxiety.

Therefore their school provision is inconsistent presenting a threat to school belonging. This is explored further below in the subtheme *understanding special guardianship*.

10.3.6 School processes, support and intervention

The second overarching theme is *school processes, support and intervention*. It consists of the subthemes *organisational change and staff mobility, quality first teaching* and *understanding guardianship*. These themes reflect more exosystemic factors and their influence on the Adam-school, Adam-home microsystems.

10.3.7 Organisational change and staff mobility (distal processes, exosystemic factors)

The school is in a state of flux, and has experienced much organisational change in the last six years (see school context). One of the outcomes of these changes has been a high level of staff mobility and a staff group split into factions, for example, the DT described each Key Stage holding separate '*unit*' staff meetings. She suggested that the lack of cohesion has had an impact on her own feelings of belonging as well as the pupil's.

'No one goes to the staff room. It is a lot better now and this summer term all of our staff meetings have been as a whole staff but as a new person, from my perspective, I didn't see everyone else mixing together. It feeds into the children and I'll be honest that I didn't really feel a sense of belonging in this school until this last term when everything you try to put in place is starting to work. So it's a journey and we are getting there...,' (DT).

The DT explained that class teachers do not share a consistent understanding of how to meet the children's emotional needs.

A lot of the staff and teachers aren't very big on our nurture provision, they don't really see the point of it, it's very much 'they need to just listen, be in class,' (DT).

The staff mobility has also led to the school being unable to provide predictable practice between class teachers, for example, Jenny commented on the unreliable transition process between class groups.

They didn't do any transition from Year 4 to Year 5, without telling me they told the children who their teachers were going to be and the teachers idea of transition was 'and I told Adam if ever he feels worried he can come and find me at any time'...and the man has left now anyway he's got promoted so that was his idea of transition. (Jenny).

The changes within the school over time have led to incorrect processes being followed and resulted in important information and knowledge about Adam's identified social and emotional needs being lost. For example, the statutory processes involved in a Statement (now lapsed) would have included a statutory annual review, which would have perhaps raised Adam's educational profile and led to intervention targeted to meet his need.

'the school just let it lapse...they said it's all changing over and we'll do it when it changes over to the new system and they never have and this SENCo said she'd look into it but I haven't heard back from her since the last meeting,' (Jenny).

As it is Adam is not on the SEN register and his school environment is adapted at the level of *quality first teaching* (the second subtheme within this overarching theme).

So they (children in guardianship) are not necessarily on the SEN register. Of all the children I would class under the DT only two of them are on the SEN register at the moment and the rest are known to me because of the DT role, (DT).

The DT's recent arrival in the school and her limited experience means that she has a narrow understanding of her role and responsibilities. This is reflected in her inaccurate description of guardianship; the processes of identification, information sharing and review.

Me: So how would you know if a child is living in Guardianship?

DT: If it was formally and the courts were involved then we would definitely be notified through the safeguarding team and we would be having very regular meetings anyway with the professionals involved. If it was done informally then we would rely on the adults telling us, but also if they didn't the child would tell us and that would go on our safeguarding records and we would investigate from there.

Thus, the school processes in place to support guardianship are flawed. This theme corresponds to the next subtheme of *understanding guardianship*.

10.3.8 Understanding guardianship

Echoes of the previous narrative presented in *organisational change* are relevant here, with regard to the lapse of Adam's Statement, high staff mobility and staff's lack of understanding of Adam's emotional needs associated with his early life and guardianship experiences. Jenny described a school organisation without the processes in place to learn from its wider community which, in turn, has an impact on the provision made available to Adam and other children in guardianship. Jenny described her frustration in communicating Adam's needs to staff in a way which leads to the provision of adequate intervention and support.

I'm reasonably articulate, and I understand every emotion Adam has before he has it, and I cannot explain to these educated professionals that that's not enough for them (children in guardianship), (Jenny).

Me: So it sounds as though it's been quite a frustrating journey.

Jenny: Yes it's absolute hell. The teachers are always lovely but because, he seems so lovely they just say he is fine, but they don't see him screaming at home.

Jenny's description of feeling unheard is in sharp contrast to the DT's definition of school belonging below which focuses on being part of a safe group where you can feel heard and supported.

I guess it means that you are part of something, that you have a role, you are listened to. You feel safe, feel like you can go and talk to someone, you'll feel listened to, you have support around you, (DT).

10.3.9 Quality first teaching (proximal processes within the school-Adam microsystem).

Within the overarching theme of school processes, support and intervention, this subtheme focuses on the school's provision of quality first teaching and the extent to which the DT's reliance on it enables Adam's sense of school belonging. In her narrative, the DT distinguished between class-based and whole school belonging,

Children-wise I think they all have a strong sense of belonging within their class. We do a lot of class based activities and all the staff make sure that we have PSHE sessions as a class and teamwork, so I think on the whole class-based belonging is very strong...but possibly as a whole school, not that it is detrimental to them, they might not yet feel belonging as a school, although it is improving. (DT)

The DT explained that the provision of quality first teaching enables Adam to receive a personalised approach. Jenny disagrees and her comments suggest that the differentiation offered through quality first teaching has not been sufficient. Below, the DT unintentionally describes inconsistent and low quality personalisation.

When we have mother's or father's day teachers are mindful of those children who might struggle with that and we just kind of will sometimes talk to them before and let them know that 'this is what we're going to be doing, is there anyone that you might

want to make it for? Maybe a brother?’ We aren’t specifically making it for a father but maybe a male figure, like grandad, brother, uncle, anybody really and the same for mother’s day, it might be a sister, auntie or whatever. Just to make sure that it is inclusive, but I think that those are the only examples I can really think of,’ (DT).

I have said that you really need to think about anything to do with family trees, his Grandmother’s Polish so if you are doing anything that is about World War II and Poland and they apologised.’ (Jenny)

Jenny gives examples where reliance on classroom practice has left Adam’s identified needs unmet, (needs which had previously been identified in the Statement). Her examples ranged from meeting his basic needs, e.g. encouraging him to wear his glasses to meeting his more complex emotional needs and associated behaviour, e.g. leaving the room when he thinks the work is too challenging.

He is supposed to wear glasses and his friend came home from school and I said, ‘so what do you think of Adam’s glasses?’ And he said, ‘I’ve never seen him wear glasses,’ and this was agreed at the last meeting. So I went into the school and she said, ‘Oh yes, I’ve been thinking I must get him to wear his glasses,’ and then we couldn’t find them anywhere anyway.

They haven’t got the time, the inclination, the space or whatever it is to just nag him. (Jenny)

When considering his complex emotional needs both Jenny and Adam agree on the importance of Adam’s relationship with a trusted and familiar adult to strengthen his sense of school belonging. For example, when he is ‘helped with his work’ he is less likely to feel ‘left behind.’ This resonates with the *aspirations and achievement* subtheme,

Me: Ok (being shown his construct) so someone who helps with work and then someone who does not get help with their work. You have put a 7.5 – how does that person feel about school belonging?

Adam: Like someone cares about their work and helping them. Just to be helped so you don't get left behind in work.

Me: and if you got left behind how would that feel?

Adam: Upsetting. They just wouldn't want to do it and they'd feel angry. They get upset.

10.4 Conclusion

Adam's case reflects the impact of early neglect, and of maintaining consistent relationships with his extended birth family over time on his sense of belonging in general. He does not seem to share other children's basic assumptions of stability. His school belonging is strengthened through his peer relationships and his activities with school friends at home.

The wider organisational changes in the school over time have threatened Adam's sense of school belonging because staff mobility is higher. This has influenced the DT's knowledge of guardianship and her ability to follow correct processes, and it has also had a detrimental impact on the consistency of quality first teaching and on Adam and Jenny's relationships and communication with staff.

Chapter 11: Cross-Case Analysis

11.1 Introduction

The preceding individual cases provided rich, particularistic, descriptive information about the school belonging experiences of young people aged between 10-16-years old, living in guardianship, their guardians and their school's DT. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a cross-case analysis by following a comparative process which explores the relationship between the generated themes in each case, identifying the similarities and variations, with the intention of producing new knowledge or meaning (Khan & Vanwynsberghe, 2008).

The cross-case analysis will explore the proximal and distal influences, person characteristics, contextual and chronosystemic elements of school belonging using Bronfenbrenner's theoretical PPCT framework (1999). The process of using a bioecological model as a conceptual aid offers the potential for insight into the complexity of the theory of school belonging. This process is reflected in Appendix XI and Appendix XII, the former presents the constellation of themes identified in each of the individual cases, the latter presents an early iteration of the themes mapped onto Bronfenbrenner's bioecological framework. Figure 11.2 presents a collection of the overarching and subthemes of school belonging mapped on to Bronfenbrenner's PPCT framework (1999).

This cross-case analysis will be followed by the discussion where I will explicitly focus on the three research questions in turn, drawing on the analysis and including summary statements and implications to contribute to knowledge in this area.

11.1.1 School Belonging

Allen, Vella-Brodrick and Waters (2016), provide a context-related definition of school belonging stating that 'school belongingness is a student's sense of affiliation to his or her school, influenced by individual, relational and organisational factors inside a broader school community and within a political, cultural and geographical landscape unique to each school setting,' (p. 98). This broad definition resonates

with Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory (1999), in that it is a complex concept which encompasses a range of factors.

11.2 Person characteristics

The themes pertaining to the personal characteristics of children living in guardianship which relate to their feelings of school belonging include *emotional regulation, ability, diagnosis, identity, individuality & association, self-image and appearance and basic needs*. Data relating to the impact of personal characteristics on school belonging were identified in all cases. The resulting themes in this area can be considered to overlap and blend, with each more or less located within Bronfenbrenner's demand, resource or force factors:

11.2.1 Demand factors

Demand factors are qualities which are quickly noticeable, which influence others' responses, e.g. age, sex, race, emotional behaviour and physical features which provoke the environment to react in a certain way. Only Clare and Daisy experience apparent physical features, Clare with Down syndrome and Daisy with early onset acne. Clare's physical features provide a protective characteristic to her belonging because of their association with the complex needs of the syndrome and Clare has received a very high level of adult support throughout her educational life.

Conversely, Daisy's early onset acne contributes to her feelings of difference from other pupils. Her narrative focused heavily on how she appears to others, as did Fred's, whose *self-image* around the style of uniform is important to him.

A salient demand characteristic of each of the young people is their emotional development. This characteristic impacts upon their school belonging as it relates to their *emotional regulation* within the school environment. It has an impact upon their relationships with adults and peers within their microsystems. The school system has managed the young people's emotional needs in a range of ways, some helpful, providing a nurturing relationship, and others potentially more harmful, rejecting the young person albeit explicitly or implicitly. For example, in Alfie and Clare's case, the school encouraged the development of positive staff relationships, whereas in Fred's

case he received multiple exclusions leading to a managed move out of the school. Mary too moved schools and Leah does not attend.

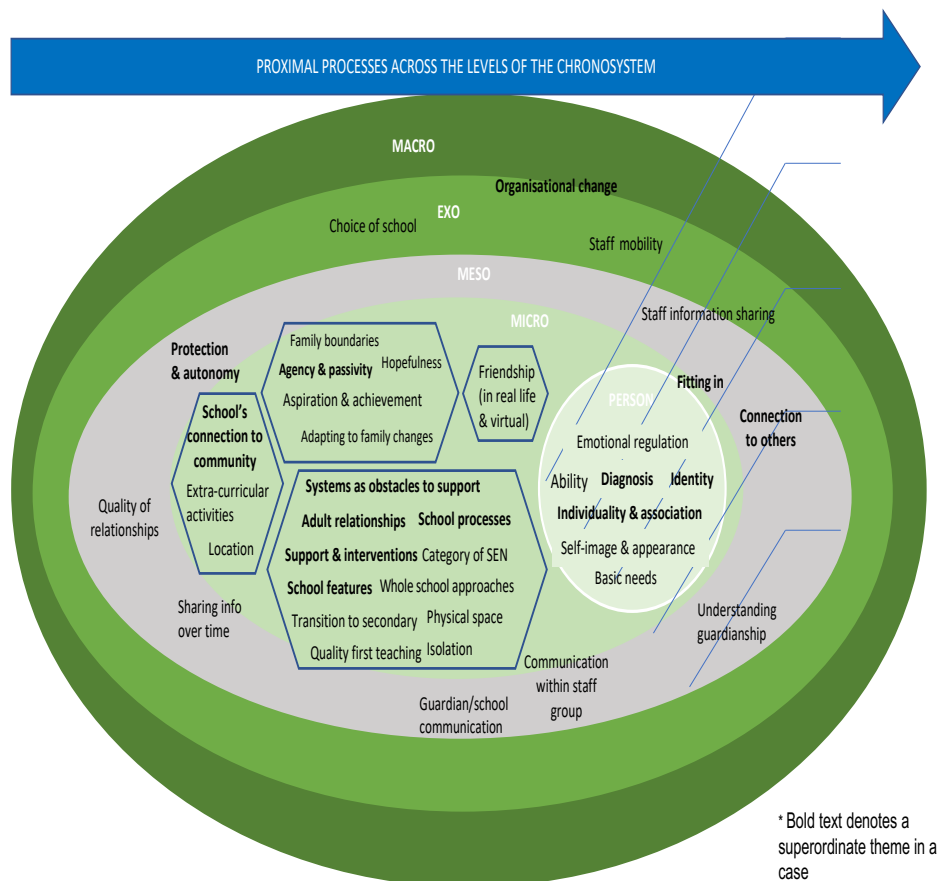
11.2.2 Resource factors

These influence a person's ability to engage in proximal processes, e.g. experience, knowledge, persistent health needs and mental health. For all of the young people their resource factors have had an impact upon their developing *identity*, their social engagement and subsequent sense of belonging. For example, notwithstanding the formal physical health diagnoses of Alfie and Clare, all of the young people exhibit behaviour which has led to either a formal health *diagnosis*, for example, autism, anxiety, ADHD, and/or a categorisation within social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH; SEND CoP, 2014). Behaviours include self-harm, non-compliance and emotional dysregulation and for several of the young people this has resulted in referral to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Whilst Clare's diagnosis has led to her being protected by the 'bubble' (Mary in Clare's case study) of a special school, the other schools' responses to the formal diagnoses have been either to rely on health services for guidance, or to depend on the school SEND processes to identify and meet these resource characteristics to develop their sense of belonging. This will be discussed in the school-young person microsystem below.

As well as the complex experiences of loss and change in their early lives, the cases present other shared resource factors particular to the population of children living in guardianship involving their understanding and knowledge of the circumstances of their guardianship, why it happened, their role in it etc. This individuality combined with the need to navigate a direct/indirect relationship with birth parent/s, siblings and other family members, who live apart from them, has an impact upon fundamental aspects of their identity and feelings of school belonging. For example, Adam associates the basic needs of food and shelter with belonging, Alfie does not understand where his name is from or the origin of his maths ability. Daisy feels upset in school when she receives news about her new half-siblings, Adam remarks that his grandparents kept his sisters but not 'the boys'.

Figure 11.1

A Collection of the Overarching and Subthemes of School Belonging Mapped on to Bronfenbrenner's PPCT Bioecological Framework (1999).



11.2.3 Force factors

Force factors are associated with resource factors, they initiate, sustain or disrupt proximal processes. These include the cognition, social, emotional and motivational factors which impact upon the young person's development. Force characteristics have an important part to play in increasing or diminishing feelings of school belonging. For example, both Alfie, Daisy and Clare describe aspects of the curriculum in which they consider themselves to experience strengths, which help their self-efficacy and their relationships with adults and peers. In contrast to this the emotional force characteristic related to impulsive or aggressive behaviour has disrupted Fred's school belonging because it has led to him receiving school sanctions involving whole days out of lessons, which has the further consequence of

him feeling he is falling behind and unable to do the work. Adam too describes a similar force characteristic when he finds work hard and he impulsively leaves the class.

Indeed, the *emotional response* of these young people, to their school environment can be associated with all three personal characteristics of Bronfenbrenner's framework (1999); force, resource and demand factors, because it is influential in sustaining or disrupting the proximal processes, it impacts upon the ability to engage in proximal processes and it impacts behaviours which influence others' responses.

The person characteristics of the young people and of the adults in their life interact within microsystems through proximal processes which influence their school belonging. The next section of this analysis examines these processes acting within the four identified microsystems of school, home, friends and the community.

11.3 Microsystems and their proximal processes

As well as the person characteristics, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (1999) considers the broader microsystems within which the young people operate and the proximal and distal processes within them.

11.3.1 School microsystem

The themes identified in the young person-school microsystem include *systems as obstacles to care, adult relationships, school processes, isolation, transition to secondary, category of SEN, whole school approaches, support and interventions, school features, physical space, quality first teaching*. In a similar way to the themes categorised as personal characteristics, the themes within each microsystem should not be considered as discrete but concepts which overlap and blend.

The theme of school processes links to several others within the school-young person microsystem. They have an important role in either increasing or diminishing the school belonging of children in guardianship.

In all cases the children living in guardianship exhibited difficulties regulating their emotional response to the learning environment but often their behaviour did not lead to them being placed on the SEN register with social, emotional and mental health needs. Although all DTs had received training about attachment theory and identified the importance of responsive relationships to meet the needs of children who had experience of developmental trauma, not all of them had the processes in place to identify which children have had this experience. Without formal categorisation and identification the support in school given to children who live in guardianship seems to be inconsistent and reactive rather than planned and responsive, which does not meet their needs, leading to their diminished and sometimes inadequate sense of school belonging. There are several possible reasons for this, some of which are influenced by elements beyond the school-young person microsystem: the DT's do not completely understand their responsibilities because there is not enough training for them; schools are not sure about when a child's behaviour should be considered as an SEMH need; health services that support children with SEMH are not aligned with school support and information. Special guardianship is recognised by the Children and Social Work Act (2017) as a priority group for local authorities, but the practice in school is not yet as embedded as the SEN processes supported by the SEND CoP (2014). Without a system of identification in schools the drive for support comes from guardians or from the young person's school behaviour.

Within the school-young person microsystem some of the DTs describe providing an inclusive environment through the proximal processes of whole school approaches and quality first teaching rather than guardianship-specific processes. However, this approach is not enough to meet the emotional needs of children in guardianship. For example, in Fred's case the whole school approach for managing low level behaviour resulted in him being directed out of classes to an isolation room for days at a time, severing his relationships, reinforcing his low self-worth associated with early rejection, loss and abandonment, and ultimately out of school. Similarly, in Adam's case, Jenny described her frustration about the staff reliance on quality teaching and whole school approaches rather than the personalisation offered by the Statement he previously had. Overwhelmingly the guardians reported that school staff do not adequately understand or meet the needs of their children. For example,

Jenny said that she thinks the staff consider Adam to be 'okay', with no understanding that he exhibits difficult to manage behaviour at home.

Without a clear process of identification and support, young people living in guardianship can remain unidentified, their needs not understood or met until it is too late and the young person is either rejected by school, as in Fred's case, or they choose to leave, as in the case of Mary and Leah who left or stopped attending respectively. None of the three were on the SEN register in school.

Within the school microsystem the relationships young-people have with adults in school were identified as an important aspect of support. Bronfenbrenner theorises that relationships develop through bidirectional influences between the young people and the adult, each influencing the other. In all of the cases the DT's shared knowledge of the benefits of a strong relationship between the young-person and an adult, often this was explicitly linked to training they had received about attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973). Bronfenbrenner's framework (1999) supports the idea that the power of proximal processes increases if they occur between people who have a strong emotional relationship. This can be seen in several of the young people's narrative, for example, Clare's belonging picture was of the adult who supported her in primary school several years ago. Alfie rated his school belonging 10/10 because 'everyone's nice there'. Hence, when the young-person experiences activities with a trusted adult/s in school this is likely to strengthen their feelings of school belonging. In contrast to the DT's assumptions, the narrative of the guardians was sometimes less positive about this aspect of school support suggesting that the relationships can become imbalanced, resulting in either co dependence and/or over reliance, the former where the adult relies upon the relationship too much (Clare) and the latter where the young-person has their social and learning needs met by a familiar adult reducing the need to make and maintain friendships (Alfie).

As well as the influence of school processes on school belonging, the physical aspects of schools, such as space, size and layout, was raised as influential to school belonging. Space in school can provide a physically containing place for young-people to connect with others, in Leah's school this was the library. Size of the school 'can militate against belonging' (SENCo, Leah's case study) because it

has an impact on staff/child relationships, for example, Alfie's school has 100 children attending and he feels supported by the staff group, whereas in the larger schools both young-people and adults spoke of difficulties in maintaining close relationships and subsequent feelings of isolation. Additionally, those located on split sites present an additional transition to key stage 4 which was raised as problematic for some children.

11.3.2 Friend microsystem

The most prominent theme raised in all of the individual cases by the young people was the importance of friendships. There were no additional themes within this microsystem. Guardians and young people raised friendship as influential to school belonging, whereas only one of the DTs raised friendship as an important element of school belonging.

Within this microsystem, there were several elements which influence the strength of friendships. For example, whilst most young people spoke of friendships they maintained by direct proximal processes within the daily school activities, the element of maintaining friendship virtually was introduced by Leah as something which helps her to maintain a close relationship with her peers because she can access their communication, although it simultaneously increases her feelings of exclusion by them and she spoke of feeling left out of the extra-curricular activities.

A second proximal process which is influential in strengthening friendships and subsequent school belonging is activities which provide an opportunity to see school friends in the community, whether school-organised activity or otherwise, activities such as sleepovers (Adam), trampolining (Mary), a club for children with additional needs (Clare). This point is not only relevant to the community microsystem below, but it is also a feature of the home-friend, home-community, home-school mesosystems strengthening belonging within and between the contexts. In a similar way to the virtual communication mentioned above, the process of seeing school friends in a different context can have positive or negative consequences, e.g. for Mary she stopped attending trampolining when she fell out with the friends at school who also attended trampolining club.

A large school with more children on roll increases the availability of peers. Only in the special school was the limited access to a broad group of children raised as an obstacle to belonging (Clare and her guardians). The 'bubble' (Mary in Clare's case study) of special school offers protection but is much smaller and this limits her access to friendships.

For most of the children the quality of their friendships are affected by their personal characteristics, particularly their emotional development associated with their early life experiences (Mary, Fred, Adam, Alfie) and also their diagnoses. (Leah, Clare, Daisy). Some of the children raised their family circumstances as a factor which can make them feel different from others, which links to the theme of *fitting in*. Daisy and Adam respond to this by informing others in school about their experiences and seeking to make connections with others who share similar experiences to them.

Several of the young people who raised concerns about the quality of friendships spoke of 'fake friends' and/or described isolation from friends as a negative influence (Alfie, Clare). Mary and Leah also described being victimised in their peer relationships. An obstacle to the quality of friendships is the young people's experiences of transient relationships leading them to call people friends although they do not know them well (Alfie), or an over reliance on one friend (Leah, Mary).

11.3.3 Home microsystem

The home microsystem is a part of the young person's immediate environment and has a direct influence on their development. The themes located within this microsystem are *family boundaries, hopefulness, agency and passivity, aspiration and achievement, adapting to family changes*. All three participant groups spoke of elements of the home microsystem as important to school belonging. Without exception all of the young people have experienced the proximal process of early developmental trauma through neglect and/or inconsistent parenting which has led to them living in guardianship. Their current home microsystems have all had to adapt over time to the emotional legacy of the young-person's experience. As well as

this they have to adapt as the young person's birth parents, mostly the guardians own children, make life choices which continue to impact upon the home-microsystem either directly or indirectly. Examples of this were parents having other children, going to and being released from prison, stopping substance abuse, death. Hence, the home microsystem adapts in response to the changing family circumstances whilst managing the emotional development of the young-people. To school belonging, these ongoing family changes can present a risk, through maintaining a constant level of flux, or a protection factor, by offering a level of stability and consistency to their life narrative from which to heal and grow. An example of risk can be seen in Daisy's case, finding out that her mother has had several more children. An example of protection is in Clare's case, because she meets her half-sibling and her mother each week.

Within the home microsystem the theme of aspiration and achievement appeared through the narrative of some of the guardians and young people. On the whole the guardians want the young people to achieve in the same way as they perceive other children to, they want them to shake off the negative legacy of their early experiences and of their birth parents. Some spoke about them being fearful that patterns will repeat (Daisy, Mary, Leah). The guardians vary in their response to this and in some cases this has an impact on the school microsystem. Relevant here is the theme of hopefulness, agency and passivity as although most guardians want their young people to achieve only Clare's guardian had a clear understanding of how they could communicate this adequately to school staff and what they could do to effect change within the education process. Most guardians had experienced challenging or confrontational discussions about this. For some, the guardians' intention to steer away from repeating patterns and towards positive life changes can harm the young-persons school belonging. For example, Jenny's hopefulness and encouragement for Adam to do well was seen to increase his feelings of performance anxiety and Ben agreeing to Mary changing school without having visited it.

11.3.4 Community microsystem

The themes in this microsystem are *school's connection to the community, extracurricular activities, location*. In a similar way to the themes presented above those in the community microsystem overlap with others. When considering these themes some of them have a more indirect influence on the young person's sense of belonging and might be considered to have exosystemic elements.

School's connection to the community directly and indirectly influences the school belonging of the young person. For example, a close knit, local community might arrange activities in school or other local buildings which directly involves the young-person, (Clare, Alfie). Indirectly, this community may know more about a family's individual circumstances which might provide a network of support to the guardian (Debbie, Jenny).

The importance of location of the school presented as an influence on the sense of belonging in some of the narratives relating to microsystem of friendships. For example where schools and home are close, children might walk to and from school (Alfie) or together attend extracurricular activities on the school grounds/within the community which can strengthen or weaken their relationships.

11.4 Mesosystem

Having explored the four microsystems, the following section considers the mesosystem which occurs where two microsystems intersect. The themes identified within the mesosystem are a central influence on school belonging as they describe the relationship between the microsystems within which the young people operate. Themes are *connection to others, communication within staff group, understanding guardianship, sharing information over time, staff information sharing, guardian/school communication, quality of relationships, fitting in, and protection and autonomy*. Some of these themes could have been positioned within a microsystem, e.g. staff information sharing is pertinent to the school microsystem, however, these themes have been placed within the mesosystem because their content lends itself more to the intersection between microsystems than it does a single context.

The intersection between the young person's home and school appears to be key in its impact upon school belonging. In school, the DT is responsible for the *connection* between guardianship families and school.

Where there is positive communication between home and school contexts the young person's sense of belonging is robust. This involves a *sharing information over time* through a collaborative partnership which in turn leads to a joint understanding of the needs of the young-person and a negotiated plan for how to meet them. This provides young people with support towards the typical school processes, e.g. transition, developing friendships and learning challenges, but also towards more guardianship-specific elements such as managing relationships with birth parents and other family members, which can be inconsistent and unreliable. Examples of this can be observed in Daisy's and Alfie's case.

In contrast, a reduction of belonging arises when the communication between home-school is diminished and the guardians' narratives are unheard. This can lead to adults between the contexts maintaining different perspectives about the needs of the young person, a lack of trust and conflict between the contexts. Both guardians and staff may consider that the other's perception lacks credibility, leaving guardians feeling dismissed by staff and less inclined to ask for help or to share information with school, and staff attributing the young person's difficulties to the home context and less inclined to provide additional support (Fred). This divergent view of the young person between the contexts presents a risk to their school belonging, (Leah, Mary).

Some DTs recognised that guardianship-school communication and understanding is not yet good enough and showed an intention to improve it (Daisy, Mary, Fred). However, all DTs spoke more positively about their connection with guardianship families than the guardians did. On the whole guardians expressed concern about the limited understanding of staff of their circumstances. In some instances communication at the interface between home and school is shared between the guardian and specific staff members, some guardians spoke about specific staff members being 'lovely'. However, *communication within the staff* group means that the information has not been shared sufficiently, perhaps because beyond the DT,

staff are unaware of the needs of children living in special guardianship and the processes in place to support them.

The importance of sharing information is particularly evident at times of transition between schools or changes of staff when the sense of school belonging is reduced (Leah, Mary, Fred, Daisy). All guardians, except Clare's, expressed frustration with the processes and level of information sharing and related it a general lack of *understanding of guardianship* issues within the school microsystem. Some guardians expressed frustration in trying to convey their concerns to staff in a way which led to them getting help (Alfie, Leah, Adam, Fred). A variety of ways of managing the home-school relationships can be seen across the cases, some guardians work within the school's SEND review process but challenge staff directly (Daisy, Alfie), others acquiesce passively (Fred, Clare, Adam), others disengage and choose to leave the situation (Mary, Leah). These ways of managing reflect the power differential between school systems and guardians.

As well as the home-school mesosystem the community-school mesosystem also featured as influential in school belonging. Some of the schools actively developed strong community links, which led to the young people participating in activities beyond the school microsystem. For example, in Alfie's case the school was located in the town's high street which encouraged the school to connect to a broad range of community activities, and led to his guardian feeling supported. Clare's special school sought to find vocational community activities for their pupils and Clare and her guardians spoke positively about the school links to the hospital work and the weekly club she attends. Hence, the community-school intersection can strengthen the sense of school belonging of the young people, and perhaps provide support to other family members.

11.5 Exosystem

The third interrelated context of Bronfenbrenner's framework (1999) is the exosystem. This system represents the contexts of which the young person is not a direct member but which have an impact on them, nonetheless. Exosystemic factors

raised within the interviews included *guardianship support, staff mobility, choice of school, training and experience of DT's*.

All of the families involved in this study were known to the local authority's Special Guardianship Team. Most of them had attended their local guardianship network support group. Those who attend this raised this as a positive factor which had helped them to understand educational, health and social care processes and to communicate with professionals in those fields. For some, this helped them to communicate with staff about their specific circumstances and led to a better understanding of the young-person's experiences and needs (Clare, Alfie, Daisy). The three guardians who reported the support group to be most helpful are grandparents, whereas Leah's guardians also attend comment that they feel different within the group when they go because they are unrelated to Leah. In Mary's, Adam's and Fred's case their guardians are not part of a broader guardianship network. The latter two found defining belonging difficult and their narrative includes feeling isolated within the school community.

As well as the Special Guardianship Team the local authority also provide training to the DTs. In the past the training has been about children in care, more recently, this has expanded to include information about guardianship and adoption and some of the DT's spoke about attending the training (Daisy, Mary, Fred). However, most of them had not yet developed a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities towards guardianship, nor had they developed robust processes to gather information or disseminate it within the staff group. Those who held a shared DT/SENCo role seemed to rely upon a system of communication which loosely paralleled the school's existing SEN processes or to associate guardianship with social care processes such as Child Protection or Children in Need. Without specific processes designed around the needs of young people living in guardianship, the young person's story might be untold or forgotten (Adam) or their needs unidentified (Mary), leading to low levels of school belonging over time (Fred, Leah).

Staff mobility is an important exo/mesosystemic influence on school belonging. In Daisy's case it enables a consistent home-school relationship over time, where knowledge of Daisy's experience was held by the head teacher who had taught her

mother, years before, when she attended the same school. In contrast to this, high levels of staff mobility leads to an inconsistent home-school relationship, which has a negative impact on school belonging. The academisation of Adam's school led to particularly high levels of staff changes, which meant processes were followed and his statement lapsed.

Within the cases, some of the DTs spoke of their own sense of school belonging, perhaps hinting at a connection between their capacity to enable the belonging of young people when they themselves feel a strong sense of belonging within the school organisation. For example, Alfie's DT communicated a deep sense of her own belonging to the school within the community, whereas in Adam's case this was the opposite. and in both of these cases the belonging of the young person and their family reflected the feelings of the DT's.

11.6 Macrosystem

The fourth context encompasses all of the other systems including elements such as legislation and codes adopting the principles of equality and inclusion. Elements to guardianship and school belonging which are situated here include statute (the Children and Social Work Act, 2017; Adoption Act, 2002), guidance to statutory processes (SEND CoP, 2014) and broader educational policy (academisation, DfE policy, OFSTED). These are top-down, strategic elements which impact upon all of the other systems in Bronfenbrenner's framework (1999), for example, the operational factors in the microsystems and communication processes in the mesosystem. Although there are no themes specifically located within the macrosystem, without exception all of the case narratives have been indirectly influenced by macro factors which has had an impact on the school belonging of the young people. For example, Adam's case where through a combination of OFSTED judgements and the academisation his school has changed management three times in the last 6 years, leading to high staff mobility, and weaker relationships with staff. In Clare's case the process of school choice and availability of special schools led to her attending a small special school which has limited her peer group and impacted her friendships. In Mary's and Fred's case the DfE managed move policy permitted

them to change schools without staff being required to pursue other options to keep them.

11.7 Chronosystem (time)

The chronosystem is the final system in the framework. It refers to the fairly simple but important concept that things change over time. It includes the transitions of the young person, their experiences and their environments. This system is split into three components: microtime, dis/continuity in ongoing episodes of activities or proximal processes; mesotime, consistency and frequency of proximal processes over days, weeks, months; macrotime, the changing societal expectations and events over time.

11.7.1 *Micro and mesotime*

Many of the specific school proximal processes which influence school belonging have been identified in the preceding sections, all of these are underpinned by micro- and mesotime as they refer to the continuity or discontinuity of ongoing processes and their frequency over time. Examples of these are the daily 'ebb and flow' of friendships, weekly events at extra-curricular activities in the community and ongoing adult connection and support.

All of the young people and several of the guardians raise the continuity of friendships as an important influence. In the cases where the proximal processes involved in friendships were discontinued or infrequent school belonging was weaker (Mary, Leah, Alfie). In contrast, where the friendships were underpinned by ongoing episodes of positive communication and involvement the young person's sense of school belonging was stronger.

Another example within the micro- mesotime level can be seen in the proximal processes of school response to the emotional responses of the young people to the learning environment. In schools where the focus was on managing the associated behaviour within a positive adult relationship over time, young people felt reassured (Adam, Clare, Daisy, Alfie), which was a positive influence on their school belonging.

Alternatively the continued response of no adult connection or a sanction-based approach, presented as an obstacle to school belonging, serving to maintain their position on the periphery of the school microsystem (Fred, Mary, Leah).

Finally, all of the guardianship families have experienced significant life changes over time. For the young people this involved their early life experiences of loss and neglect which led to the SGO. The guardians raised a variety of contact arrangements with their own sons and daughters or the young person's birth parents, for some this is unreliable and infrequent (Alfie, Fred, Leah), for others it is more consistent (Clare, Adam); for others there is no direct contact, only new knowledge of half-siblings and changes in circumstances (Mary, Daisy). Contact has an impact on the young person's general feelings of belonging which is reflected in most of the young persons' 'not belonging' pictures where they drew members of their birth family.

11.7.2 Macrotime

The recent statutory changes in the Children and Social Work Act (2017) represent a macrotime factor which is helpful in focusing the practice of local authorities and schools towards understanding and meeting the needs of guardianship families. Some of the guardians attend frequent network events and some of the DTs spoke of attending training and communicating with other professionals to implement processes which support them in their role.

A second macrotime factor involves the growing body of psychological evidence, associated with attachment theory, regarding the long-term impact of early neglect on child development. This knowledge is reflected in the narrative of some of the guardians and school staff (Alfie, Daisy) where the theory has informed the school proximal processes, specifically staff responses to emotional and social behaviour of the young people.

11.8 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a cross-case analysis of the themes about school belonging generated from the interviews carried out in each individual case. The

analysis followed a comparative process, identifying similarities and variance, between the cases. It offers insight into the complexity of the concept of school belonging as it relates to special guardianship. It was presented using Bronfenbrenner's PPCT framework (1999) and explored the proximal and distal processes, person characteristics, contextual and chronosystemic influences of school belonging.

In the following chapter I will present the discussion where I will consider each of the research questions in turn using this analysis within the context of extant literature and policy. This process will enable me to draw conclusions and identify implications to inform education practice.

Chapter 12: Discussion

12.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to develop an understanding of the educational experiences of young people living in special guardianship from their perspective, their guardian's perspective and a relevant staff member, with a focus on a bioecological view of school belonging. The intention is not to draw general conclusions but to gain insight by reflecting on the details of the case studies, enabling naturalistic generalisation (Hammersley et al., 2000), providing a deeper understanding of school belonging (Willig, 2013). This research developed in response to two observations from my professional role as an EP: the first that this group of young people is increasing (Simmonds, 2011) and the second that the experiences of young people living in guardianship and their families seem unheard and thereby potentially misunderstood by school staff.

The literature review outlined a paucity of research exploring the school experiences of young people living in guardianship (Harwin et al., 2019) and that there is therefore a need for further work to raise awareness of children living in such circumstances (Wade et al., 2014). Significant studies in this field refer to these young people's higher than average emotional, behavioural and communication needs (Selwyn et al., 2014; Wade et al., 2014) but neither directly explore their *school* experiences. Gore Langton (DfE, 2017) states that time spent at school provides young people living in guardianship with the opportunity to 'give them a new experience of themselves, others and the world' (p. 3). As such, this study focused on exploring the understanding and experiences of school belonging from the perspective of the young people, their guardians and the DT. School belonging is a psychological concept associated with benefits in the areas of identity, relationships, agency and security. It is assumed to involve an interrelated network of individual and wider contextual elements (Allen et al., 2016), hence, the use of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT (1999) framework in the preceding cases.

Thematic analysis of the individual cases and cross case analysis identified themes, which were triangulated for rigour. In the following discussion each research question will be answered by synthesising the key findings from that data with the extant literature. This process will lead to conclusions about school belonging and guardianship and to implications for educational policy and school practice. I will also consider future directions for research and evaluate the study.

12.2 Research question 1

How do young people living in special guardianship understand and experience school belonging?

The purpose of this question was to understand how young people experience school belonging from *their* perspective and in doing so identify the factors which they consider to be important. This will offer a person-centred insight into how to improve their experience of school belonging in order to promote and sustain positive outcomes. The young people interviewed provided rich data relevant to the question and the key factors pertinent to their responses are their person characteristics and aspects of the friend and school microsystems.

Before considering the specific features raised by the young people it is important to note that the personal construct psychology techniques used in the young people's interviews meant that their responses were unprompted and came from them. They each sketched a picture of a time when they have 'belonged' and its contrast and all of the young people drew these pictures without issue, indicating that they all had a subjective understanding of the concept of belonging. Similarly when asked to rate their school belonging on the scale between the pictures, all were able to do so. Perhaps indicating that although the concepts of belonging and school belonging share common elements, they do not share a single definition, forming a 'family resemblance', as described by Wittgenstein (1953).

This analysis found that the single most important feature of school belonging from the perspective of the young people was their peer relationships, all of the young people in this study spoke of them. Where relationships were positive, friendships

were developed by bridging the home-school-community contexts with shared activity such as sleepovers or club attendance. Friendships were also strengthened in relation to the young person's self-perception of a relative curriculum strength, e.g. art, maths or football. Weaker peer relationships involving negative experiences were a source of anxiety particularly for young people in secondary school who reported a diminished school belonging (Leah, Mary, Fred), leaving them feeling isolated, resulting in some leaving or wanting to change school. This is discussed further below.

These findings reflect Goodenow and Grady's (1993a) definition of school belonging 'the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the school environment' (p. 80). They are also consistent with much of the extant literature about young people and their peer relationships (Cragg & Kelly, 2018a) . For example, Gowing (2019) explored school connectedness and found that children's relationships with their peers were the main relationship in school and that other areas of school life were, both positively and negatively influenced by them (Gowing 2019, Midgen et al., 2019). Peer relationships were strengthened across community activities (Bower et al., 2015; Midgen et al., 2019), whereas negative relationships with peers were a source of stress (Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2007) in secondary school aged pupils (Woolley et al., 2009).

In some cases, strong adult relationships enabled school belonging. This is in line with Midgen et al. (2019) and with the DfE (2018) publication *Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools* which states that '*school should be a safe and affirming place for children where they can develop a sense of belonging and feel able to trust and talk openly with adults about their problems*' (p. 13). However, in this study there seemed to be a difference between the primary and secondary school contexts, with those young people in primary school who received higher levels of adult support perhaps more focused on the importance of it to their belonging (Clare, Daisy, Adam). Those in mainstream secondary schools did not mention school staff as influential at all, focusing instead on their peer relationships. This finding reflects the conclusions of other studies, such as those of Gorard and See (2011) who found that of 3,000 secondary school pupils having friends was pivotal to their enjoyment of school.

The quality of the young people's relationships with peers was an overarching theme across the cases. Often descriptions of intense, 'all or nothing' relationships were given, (Mary, Leah, Fred, Alfie), suggesting that although they sought reliable peer relationships they were often transient. All of the young people had either experienced difficulties or were worried about how to maintain positive relationships with their peers over time. As a response to their relational experiences the young people either looked to their own or others' personal characteristics to explain why peer relationships were difficult, for example, their appearance, their behaviour, their identity ('real me' and 'fake friends'). In most cases there was school behaviour indicating difficulties in emotional regulation e.g. self-harming or running out of class. None of them raised their own early experiences as a reason why things might go wrong and this might be associated with their developmental stage or perhaps their locus of control (Lefcourt, 1976).

These findings challenge those of Aldgate and McIntosh (2006) who interviewed 30 children and concluded that their lives were 'positive and ordinary'. This research validates the large body of literature recognising the importance of early-life relationships and the long-term impact of a neglectful early life as a template to the young person's subsequent relationships (Bowlby, 1973; Kim & Chicchetti, 2010). This work extends that of Selwyn et al. (2014) and Wade et al. (2014), who concluded that young people living in guardianship experience higher than average emotional, behavioural and communication needs. It suggests that features of some guardianships families might exacerbate the young person's emotional, behavioural and communication needs which in turn may lead them to feel different and distanced from their peers, further influencing their feelings of school belonging.

12.3 Research question 2

How do guardians understand and experience school belonging?

The purpose of this question was to understand how guardians experience school belonging and in doing so identify the factors which they consider to be important. This will offer insight into how to improve the young person's experience of school

belonging in order to promote and sustain positive outcomes. Using the cross-case analysis elements pertinent to this answer fall within the micro, meso and exo systemic level. The semi-structured adult interviews combined a deductive and inductive approach because as well as questions generated from extant school belonging literature there were opportunities for the guardians to speak freely. Within this group's data there were several strong themes.

In concurrence with the young people's data, the guardians seem to consider the peer relationships of the young person as important. However, in most of the cases the guardians viewed the young people's friendships less positively than the young people. They expressed concern about both the quantity and quality of their friendships and attributed these difficulties to the young person's social and emotional development. Interestingly, the guardian's understanding of the cause of the young person's developmental needs in these areas were mostly unrelated to their early life experiences, which is supported by Gore Langton's assertion that the 'implicit assumption that permanence mitigates the impact of abuse, neglect, trauma and loss' (2016, p.17). Instead the difficulties in peer relationships were linked to other environmental factors such as transition between primary and secondary school, too much adult support obstructing their peer relationships, or to health conditions, for example, ADHD, autism and Down syndrome. Indeed, in the cases where the young people had a diagnosis, the guardians described feeling a sense of relief when they found out. Despite the diagnoses not leading to improvements in the young person's friendships the relief perhaps comes from the presence of an explanation of why things might be difficult and reduces feelings of self-blame for the young person's experiences. This finding is consistent with research involving biological parents and diagnosis (Avdi et al., 2000; Bloch & Weinstein, 2010; Rosenthal et al., 2001).

The guardian's narrow understanding of the link between the emotional needs of the young people and their early life experiences might be associated with the limited provision of training to this group by the local authority, which is not 'equal to the best practice of adoption and foster care,' (Harwin et al., 2019, p. 9).

This research found that although some guardians spoke positively about some specific members of school staff, all expressed an overwhelming sense of frustration about the school staff's lack of understanding of the young person's needs and of guardianship generally. Guardians felt that there was often an inappropriate amount of support: If the level of support was too high it interfered with the young person's peer relationships and if it was too low then their emotional and behavioural responses were not well met. The guardian's feelings of frustration introduced a vulnerability to the home-school relationship, and in some cases communication broke down and the young person left or withdrew from the school.

One challenge to the communication between home and school contexts, might be the perceived or real power differential between guardians and staff, leaving the former feeling unheard. This is supported by the work of Tett (2010) who proposes that inequality is a consistent factor between these contexts. Despite this, existing research suggests that information sharing between home-school systems can promote a helpful school identity beyond the school environment and into the community, (Anderson et al., 2006). In line with this, some guardians raised community as influential to school belonging, which could strengthen or weaken peer relationships, for example, shared activities across school-community contexts was considered to be helpful. In this study, community knowledge of the home context might be both helpful and unhelpful. For example, it could provide a supportive network of other guardians in similar circumstances or it could impede a '*fresh start*' (Cathy in Daisy's case) because of the negative legacy. Proximity of the school to home also featured as an influence on school belonging with closer schools enabling walking with peers or other family members which was helpful. This is consistent with the work of Anderman (2002).

Often the guardians spoke about their aspiration for the young person's future, but this was couched in their concerns about future events more generally, such as transition to secondary school/college or maintaining a relationship with birth family members. Guardians worrying about the future is consistent with current findings (Dunne and Kettler, 2007; Grandparents Plus, 2014;).

12.4 Research question 3

How do DTs understand and experience the school belonging of children living in special guardianship?

The purpose of this question was to understand what factors DT consider to be influential to the school belonging of children living in guardianship. This will offer insight into how to improve the young peoples' and guardians' experiences of school belonging in order to promote more positive outcomes. Within the cross-case analysis the meso, exo, macro and chrono system are all pertinent to this question. As with the guardians, the semi-structured interview combined a deductive and inductive approach using questions generated from extant school belonging literature together with opportunity for the DTs to speak freely.

When considering how to foster school belonging in their school, none of the DTs had previously considered the concept of 'school belonging' but all defined it in ways reflected in the literature regarding the importance of forming and maintaining 'lasting, positive and significant interpersonal relationships' (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 497). The DTs argued that they promoted this through good quality first teaching and whole school approaches, including factors such as school uniform, a broad curriculum supported by a range of resources, in-school extra-curricular activities and vigilance of social relationships. Their arguments are supported by the literature and all of these factors have been associated with school belonging (Bower et al., 2015; Loukas et al., 2010; Rahman, 2013; Selwyn et al., 2014).

The findings also indicated that for the DTs sharing information between home and school, with other staff in school and at Year 6 transition to secondary school might be key. Factors which influenced information sharing included school size (in a small school information could perhaps be shared between staff more easily) and staff stability. A highly mobile staff group might lead to the loss of knowledge about the young person and the family over time, in turn perhaps reducing levels of trust between home and school.

None of the DTs mentioned the Children and Social Work Act (2017) which underpins the role and stipulates local authority and school responsibilities. For example, it places a duty on local authorities to ensure the designated person undertakes appropriate training. Five of the DTs were in their first year, perhaps limiting their opportunity to attend local authority training. Some spoke of learning on the job and taking their lead from other staff with similar responsibilities. Those that had attended the training did not exhibit knowledge of guardian-specific processes, perhaps suggesting that the training was not yet adequate. There was a recognition by some DTs, that the processes supporting guardianship (whether previously placed or not) are not as robust as for those in care.

The data suggests that although the DTs may have had limited access to training, they all conveyed an understanding that young people who have experienced early neglect and maltreatment are more likely to experience emotional and social difficulties which might impact negatively on their peer relationships and learning. DTs focused on the importance of co-regulation through relational approaches with a reliable and responsive adult in school and school belonging was associated with the young person's feeling of safety associated with spaces and adult relationships. This reflects that the message of the training is underpinned by attachment theory and associated work (Bowlby, 1973; Kim & Cicchetti, 2010). The focus on adult relationships contrasts that of the young people and their guardians, who placed importance on peer relationships. Perhaps as Smith et al. (2017) posit this indicates a need for schools to use complementary approaches to attachment theory when considering how to understand and meet the needs of this group.

In the primary school cases, when a young person living in guardianship exhibited emotional and social difficulties that were significant enough to require an intervention, the DTs would provide them with an intervention aimed at developing a relationship with a staff member who had received training in attachment theory.

In contrast, there was a difference between the DT's espoused theory and practice in the secondary school cases. Although the DTs spoke of attachment theory underpinning their practice, the emotional and social needs of the young person were not always met with an attachment informed intervention but by ad hoc

systems, such as the whole school reward/sanction system, email or text communication. The findings indicate that a possible reason for this included the larger school size and staff group meant that a relational approach was more difficult to maintain and the response to the young people's needs were inconsistently met.

Emerging from this study, school belonging might be affected by a shared DT/SENCo role which leads to SEN training, interventions and processes supporting staff and guardianship families. However, despite the shared role, identification of need presents as a problem and most were uncertain about when to consider a young person's emotional and social needs as a special educational need. In some cases, the young person's emotional and social needs were identified and met within the SEN process and the young person's name was put on the school's SEN register as a social, emotional and mental health (SEMH; SEND CoP, 2014), (Daisy, Alfie). In other cases, additional intervention was put in place without the young person being placed on the SEN register. One DT reflected on the clarity of the previous SEN CoP, (2001) where the involvement of an external service meant that the pupil could be placed on the SEN register. However, she added that if all of the children accessing CAMHs were 'on the register' then the school's SEN system would be overwhelmed. Some of the DTs spoke of feeling frustrated with health and social care services because of their lack of information sharing and the strict criteria in place which they viewed as obstructing young people's access to their support.

Problematically for some families, the Children and Social Work Act (2017), states that the DTs responsibility is for promoting the educational achievement of previously looked after pupils. Thus, the Act does not extend to *all* families with a SGO. Of the seven case studies, four of the young people had not experienced a care placement because their grandparents took responsibility for them before applying for the SGO. Therefore, although the Act was expected to extend support to a broader group, this study presents a limitation of the use of the term 'previously looked after'. The Act encourages DTs to ask guardians for evidence of previously looked-after status, and when there is no evidence of this DTs can use their discretion or communicate with the local authority for guidance. This requires the DTs to discover who lives in a kinship family, the legal status of the arrangement and whether the young person previously looked after. The Children and Social Work Act, (2017) states that

coordinating home/school communication is one of the DT's duties. However, information gained through increased communication might be sensitive, requiring a high level of trust between the DT and guardian. This study found that although DTs considered a strong relationship with guardians and information about the young person's early life to be helpful in understanding and meeting the needs of the young person, some were reluctant to proactively ask for this detail and preferred instead, for guardians to approach them.

12.5 Contribution to knowledge

This study contributes to knowledge in several ways, each of which will be discussed below. Some of the findings are consistent with extant literature, some refine it whilst others contribute new knowledge in this area:

Methodologically, the use of Bronfenbrenner's (1999) bioecological framework has provided a useful conceptual aid at every stage of the study and is itself a contribution beyond the simple, often used and referred to earlier ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This use of Bronfenbrenner's framework supported a broader understanding of belonging than in much of the existing research. Also, using PCP to explore the concept of belonging and school belonging with this group of young people has not previously been carried out and extends the use of PCP within educational research (Beaver, 2011; Kelly, 1955a; Ravenette, 1980;).

There is a dearth of research gathering the views of young people in special guardianship about their school experiences. This study offers new information, and further insight about their understanding and experiences of school belonging by directly asking them. It concurs with existing literature indicating the importance of peer relationships to belonging. Although most young people reported having friends, they experienced difficulty in maintaining friendships and they sometimes associated this with being different in some way from their peers. This might be associated with the influence of early neglect on the social and emotional development of these young people. Further, in secondary schools, when their peer relationships are negative there is a more profound impact on their sense of school belonging, which can lead to them wanting to leave the school. This research

proposes that although young people may benefit from a strong relationship with an adult, many consider peer relationships to be more important.

This study found that whilst the guardians and DTs had some understanding of the potential impact of the young person's early life experiences on their feelings of school belonging, none of the young people expressed this understanding about themselves. Perhaps this suggests that currently knowledge about the potential impact on development of early trauma and neglect exists only within the adult-world, and has not been communicated to young people in a way which might be useful for them, which leaves them feeling confused about why they find some aspects of socialisation difficult.

With regard to young people's peer relationships, the second research question extends existing research, in that guardians also rate their young person's peer relationships as important, but they perceive them to be of poor quality. Guardians shared the early experiences of the young person but did not connect them directly to the young person's experiences of school belonging. Instead they attributed diagnosable conditions, school processes and staff communication. In line with much research regarding parent-school communication, guardians reported feeling frustrated at not being able to convey the needs of the young person to staff in a way which led to their needs being met. This led to some guardians worrying about the progress and future prospects of the young person which had a negative impact on the relationship between guardians and staff. Most guardians perceived a strong school/community link to be a positive influence on school belonging.

Finally, the third research question focused on the DTs' understanding and experiences of special guardianship. There is no current research in this area and therefore this study is an important contribution to knowledge. Whilst DTs all had an understanding of belonging, none of them had considered it as a concept which might underpin their role with regard to young people in school. All DTs spoke of the young people experiencing difficulties with friendships. They had at least a basic understanding of attachment theory and had provided interventions underpinned by it to help the young people to develop a strong and well attuned relationship with an adult.

Most of the DTs were relatively new to the role, and some felt a stronger sense of their own belonging to the school organisation than others. Some knew more than others about the processes of special guardianship, commenting that special guardianship is not well resourced. Most of this information was learned on the job and/or from colleagues doing a similar job. None of the DTs seemed to have knowledge of their statutory roles and responsibilities towards this group of children. The DT's knowledge about how to support this group of young people came from their experience and knowledge of how to support children in care or by adapting the school's SEN processes. Some of them misunderstood the information sharing processes of Social Care and none had formal processes in place to identify which children lived in special guardianship, which have previously been in care or the specific circumstances leading to the SGO.

Having discussed the contribution of this study, the implications for educational policy and school practice will be considered in the concluding chapter of this thesis. I will also consider future directions for research and evaluate the study.

Chapter 13: Conclusion

This study sought to explore special guardianship relating to school belonging, from the perspective of the young people, guardians and designated teachers, by using Bronfenbrenner's PPCT (1999) bioecological perspective. The intention was not to draw general conclusions but to gain insight (Willig, 2013) by reflecting on the details of the case studies to provide a deeper understanding of school belonging. The implications of the work for research, educational policy, the practice of educational psychology, and school practice will be considered below:

13.1 Implications of the study

13.1.1 Terminology

With regard to research, there is a range of terminology relating to school belonging. This is problematic because the use of different terms for the same concept inhibits its conceptual progress, (Podsakoff et al., 2016) and weakens it, undermining its discriminant validity. Without a clear definition it is a concept that is 'everywhere and nowhere' (Peterson et al., 2014, p. 16). This means that in school practice there is currently no specific focus on provision to develop the school belonging of young people. Peterson et al. (2014) suggest that practice underpinning this type of concept should focus on several specific areas of the school organisation. Future research might explore the conceptual definition of belonging and school belonging in order to define a common terminology for use in schools.

13.1.2 Identification

Current regulation limits the responsibility of local authorities to monitoring only those children in special guardianship who have previous experience of care. However, special guardianship is complicated and includes children who have previously been placed in care and those who have not. A higher level of resource is available to those with previous care experience. This study proposes that with or without a previous care experience, the impact of early neglect and trauma, often combined with a complex pattern of contact with birth parents and siblings, should be enough

for all special guardianship families to access the resources they require. Therefore, a review of this policy should be held to extend the regulations giving all special guardianship families the same status, with a statutory review of their academic progress and wellbeing. Thus recognising the potential long-term impact of neglect and also encouraging an approach targeted on the needs of guardianship families rather than previous care status.

13.1.3 Needs analysis

Schools require clarity from local authorities about when to categorise children as experiencing an SEMH need (SEN CoP, 2014) and what support is available for those who are not identified within this category but are exhibiting behaviour which may be associated with early neglect and trauma experiences.

In order for schools to provide an equitable response in meeting the needs of young people in guardianship there should be improved opportunity for proactive collaboration between guardians and DTs, recognising and valuing the contribution guardians can make to support the educational process. (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Schools should develop specific processes geared towards identifying, understanding and meeting the needs of young people in special guardianship. For example, each family should have a comprehensive needs analysis, where mutual priorities and whole school and targeted intervention can be agreed. Improving school/community links, enhanced transition through clear communication between primary and secondary schools and enabling peer relationships by providing planned and spontaneous relational opportunities among peers within school (Gowing, 2019) should be a focus.

13.1.4 Training

There is a need to provide ongoing training to guardians, in order to help them to understand and identify the needs of the young person, how to relate more effectively with them and their birth parents. Also, signposting them to local and national services and what they can reasonably expect from school.

Many local authorities provide training to DTs and this should include an elaborate model of the intersection of families for whom the DTs are responsible. This is particularly important if the SENCo is also the DT. The provision of formally accredited training, similar to the SENCo Award, would encourage a consistently high standard of practice supporting the multiplicity and complexity of young people and their additional needs.

13.1.5 Implications for educational psychologists

The implications of this study for educational psychology practice includes work across local authorities, whole school organisations and at an individual case level. As a professional group, EPs could be more consistent in their use of the term school belonging to encourage schools to focus their interventions on improving young people's experiences and outcomes associated with the concept.

EPs could also work with the virtual schools in local authorities to provide psychological training, supervision and mentoring to DTs and to those supporting guardianship families in schools. Supporting guardians by providing training in child development and related areas, drop-ins or supervision might also be helpful to this group.

EP involvement might also support other professional groups in their understanding of school belonging and the needs of guardianship families and how to meet them, e.g. youth workers, social workers.

At a whole school level, EPs can promote inclusive policies and practice to ensure that guardianship families are identified and that the needs of the family and young person are understood and met, e.g. by training staff in how to sensitively gather and record sensitive information, by ensuring that the SENCo and DT role and responsibilities connect and synergise to ensure that the needs of guardianship families and young people are understood and supported to improve their outcomes.

13.2 Evaluation

To evaluate the integrity of qualitative research Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose four tenets of trustworthiness (Connelly, 2016; Noble & Smith, 2015): credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability. Taking each tenet in turn the quality of this study will be explored:

13.2.1 Credibility

Triangulation was achieved across the three data sources in each case and across the cases in the cross-case analysis. For each case study and the cross-case analysis I read and reread the transcripts, analysing them to improve the accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings. At the early design stage of the study in an effort to improve credibility, I had hoped to meet the young people over a number of sessions and to bring all three participants together to discuss school belonging further. This approach was naïve as the complexity of the young people's experiences (as recounted by the guardians) meant that meeting them several times might mislead and/or harm them by giving them another experience of developing and losing a relationship with a trusted adult. I also reflected that the expectation of meeting the three case participants together, was based on my professional experience of joint problem solving as an educational psychologist. I was confusing my role as researcher with my professional role (Appendix XIII) and the function of the research was different.

The use of self-selecting participants encourages those who have a vested interest in the research (Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1976), and this presents a limitation to the trustworthiness of the study. However, within each case only the guardian initially volunteered, whereas the young people and DTs gave their consent, perhaps reducing the impact of the self-selection bias. A possible drawback to the recruitment process was that all of the guardians were identified at the Special Guardianship Team's drop-in, which might indicate that they experienced challenges involving the guardianship process. However, alternative ways of accessing the guardianship families would have been difficult, for example, approaching schools directly to ask them to identify families was an option but they might have possibly approached

families with whom they had a positive relationship which would limit the rigour of the study.

Member checking was carried out by giving adult participants the opportunity to see their transcripts when typed and at the end of each interview all participants were reminded that they could contact me should they wish to. Further, my supervisors read each draft case study and we discussed and changed themes until they represented the analysis accurately.

13.2.2 Dependability

Dependability refers to ‘whether the research process is consistent and carried out with careful attention to the rules and conventions of qualitative methodology’ (Ulin et al., 2005, p. 26). In this study the description of methodology and methods is clear and transparent (Guba, 1981) which means that others can reproduce the methods.

A limitation of the study might be the relatively small number of participant families, but the group was highly diverse and represented a variety of different and valid perspectives, which provided broad and rich data to analyse, reflecting the complexity of school belonging and special guardianship. The case study approach provided a rich and deep understanding of the complexity of special guardianship with regard to school belonging in its natural setting (Coimbra & Martins, 2013). The research took an idiographic methodological approach, valuing the voice of the individual and therefore the aim was not to draw general conclusions or to claim to prove something. Instead, the study enabled naturalistic generalisation (Hammersley et al., 2000), providing insight into special guardianship and school belonging by reflecting on the details of each case study.

Future research might seek to gain more information from a broader group of young people, perhaps through a longitudinal study, which could identify the long term influence of a strong sense of school belonging.

13.2.3 Transferability

Sufficiently detailed contextual information has been provided, presenting a thick description in each case (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to ensure that readers are able to determine how similar the research environment is to other situations (Guba, 1981). However, I did not meet with participants over time as the design was not longitudinal and this presents a limitation to the full use of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT framework (1999), specifically the time (T) factor (Tudge et al., 2009). To counter this guardians and DTs were encouraged to reflect on their experiences over time and the narrative presented in the case studies reflects this. Although Bronfenbrenner's PPCT framework (1999) features throughout the analysis it was intended as a conceptual aid to it, which did not require a stringent focus on each PPCT factor.

13.2.4 Confirmability

Throughout this research process I have carefully reflected upon my positionality and its influence upon my analysis and subsequent findings (Appendix XIII). To support this I have maintained a reflexive diary, met regularly with supervisors and discussed the research with professional colleagues. Reflexivity is integral to my professional life and as such, I have reflected throughout the process in an attempt to raise awareness of my subjectivity and preconceptions and to reveal and make explicit my process of analysis and interpretation.

13.3 Conclusion

This study has given me the opportunity to reflect on my understanding of the complex concept of school belonging. It has also given me a deeper appreciation of the intricacies of the world of psychological research and inquiry whilst broadening my knowledge of the 'lived experience' of special guardianship. At times this has been a truly humbling experience, which has served to increase my resolve and motivation to illuminate the experiences of special guardianship families and amplify their voice through my professional role. Notwithstanding the macro and exosystemic implications this study raises there are relatively simple operational changes within the mesosystem and the school microsystem that could improve the school

belonging experiences of young people living in guardianship and it is important and necessary that adaptations are made. Future research could focus on designing, implementing and evaluating a training programme for DTs to improve their understanding of how to enhance school belonging and support the outcomes of this group of young people.

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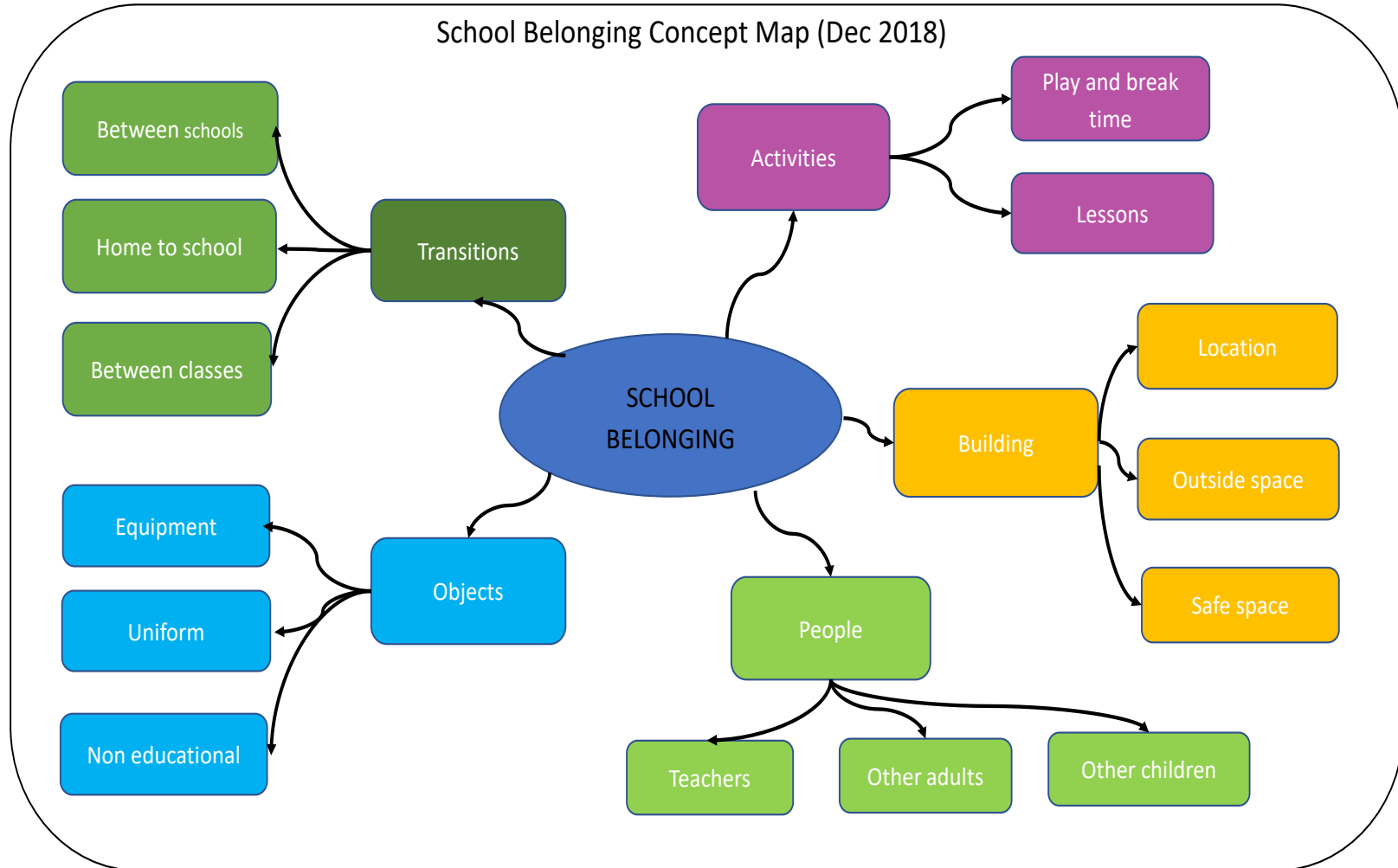
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Appendix I - Belonging concept map (December 2018)



Appendix II - Recruitment and information letter

How do schools help young people living in guardianship feel they belong?

Research opportunity for guardians, designated teachers and their children about school experiences.

Hello, my name is Lata Ramoutar, (lr411@exeter.ac.uk) I am an Educational Psychologist who is completing some research about the school experiences of young people living in guardianship.

Would you like to take part?

It would involve meeting me so that I can find out about yours and your child's views about school. If you decide you would like to take part, you need to read and sign a short form to say you are happy to take part. Even if you do this, you can still quit at any time.

Can I ask questions before I decide?

Yes. My email address and phone number is at the bottom of this letter so please feel free to contact me with any questions. If you prefer please tell the person running this drop in that you're interested and leave your contact details, I will contact you and let you have more information about study if you want it. There are no right or wrong answers only your opinion.

What will happen if I take part?

First you need to sign the forms that you are happy to take part (guardians will need to sign to consent to their child taking part, as well as the young person). Then I will contact you and the school and agree a convenient date and time to meet you there privately. Altogether we will meet for approximately 50-60 minutes.

If your child agrees to take part then I will also meet them twice in school for approximately 45-60 minutes to really listen to what they have to say about school. I would also like to speak to the teacher with responsibility for children living in guardianship too to find out how they think that the school supports children live in guardianship.

At some time after I have met with everyone on their own I would like to meet with you, your child and the teacher together to find out if there is anything else you want to tell me. This is an optional part of the study.

Will what I say be kept private?

Yes. I will record what you say on a tape recorder so I can listen later and write down your ideas.

I will use the code on the tape so that when I write down your answers no one knows it's you what school you are connected to. No one else will hear the tape and all information will be stored in a locked cabinet so no one else can see it.

What will happen to the information?

It will all be anonymous and I'm going to write about what I find and use it to inform others about special guardianship in schools. I also want to write a paper. The aim of this research is to identify how schools can help children living in guardianship to feel a strong sense of belonging at school.

Researcher: Lata Ramoutar (BSc, PGCE, MSc, MBA) lr411@exeter.ac.uk Tel: 01392 72XXXX
Address: NC109, St Luke's Campus, College of Social Sciences, Exeter University, Devon, UK.

Supervisor: Brahm Norwich and Hannah Anglin-Jaffe Email address: b.norwich@exeter.ac.uk and h.a.anglin-jaffe@exeter.ac.uk

A bit more about the study....

Aims and Research Questions:

The central aim of this research is to explore the educational experiences of secondary school aged children who live in a kinship care arrangement (Special Guardianship Order, SGO) in the UK with reference to their feelings of school belonging.

The research questions are: How do young people and their guardians understand and experience school belonging? What factors do young people living in special guardianship associate with school belonging? How do designated teachers understand school belonging with reference to special guardianship?

Research indicates that children living with a guardian often have experienced traumatic early lives, with high levels of maltreatment, neglect and loss. Much previous research in this area focusses on the guardians and the home placement rather than on the children and young people themselves. There is no study directly focusing on this group's views about their school life.

Empirical research indicates that 'belonging' affords children the identity, relationships, agency and security required to learn and thrive; providing enhanced academic achievement and psychosocial well-being for students with disabilities; higher end of year grades; higher student expectations for success and value of school work.

The research will raise awareness and illuminate the views of this group of children, their families and the role schools play in their lives. In turn this will provide the social and educational services with an original, enlightened and new understanding of this vulnerable group to inform, practice and change local policy to better meet the needs of these children and their families.

Methodology:

Participants: Approximately 8-10 pupils aged between 10-16, attending a mainstream secondary school, in the South West of England, their guardians and the teachers designated with responsibility for children living in special guardianship.

Proposed Methods: Individual meetings will be carried out face-to-face, 1:1 in the pupil's school in a quiet and confidential space. Data will be collected using interviews. Single meetings will be carried out with the designated teachers and guardians. Two or three meetings will be carried out with each pupil. All interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed.

Appendix III: Those who did not participate

Two guardians had children who were younger than ten years old; another told me that her child had started truanting and she thought that participating might be unhelpful at this time; another said that her child had just transitioned to another school because of repeated exclusions and he was worried that what he said would 'get back to' the previous designated teacher; one was attending a school designated for children who experience social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulties and the guardian and I agreed that it might be confusing for the young person to participate because he was seeing an educational psychologist in school.

Appendix IV - Ethics approval certificate



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

St Luke's Campus
Heavitree Road
Exeter UK EX1 2LU

<http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/>

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Title of Project: Children Living in Special Guardianship: Exploring their Educational Experiences and Feelings of School Belonging.

Researcher(s) name: Lata Ramoutar

Supervisor(s): Brahm Norwich & Hannah Anglin-Jaffe

This project has been approved for the period

From: 01/02/2019

To: 01/07/2022

Ethics Committee approval reference: D1819-19

Signature:  Date: 13/12/2018
(Professor Dongbo Zhang, Graduate School of Education Ethics Officer)

Appendix V – Information and consent: Guardian

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, please take some time to read the following information carefully. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

My name is Lata Ramoutar. I am conducting this research as part of a Doctorate in Education. I work as an educational psychologist. The study has received full ethical clearance by the University of Exeter Graduate School of Education ethics committee.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study aims to find out about the experiences of children who live in guardianship to help to understand and identify how they feel and belong at school. The information will be used to help to identify and meet the needs of these children in school.

Do I have to take part?

No. It's up to you whether or not to take part. If you do, you will be given this information sheet to keep and you will be asked to sign a consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason; if you do then all identifiable materials will be destroyed and your data will be removed from future analysis.

What will happen if I take part?

If you decide you would like to take part in the study, you sign a consent form agreeing to participate and we will meet together for about an hour. This will involve you answering questions so that I can gather information from you about how you think the school helps/or does not help your child to belong. Our discussion may lead you to think about things you hadn't given much thought to before, so you might learn something about yourself from thinking about yours and your child's experiences, as well as providing me with helpful insights.

While we are talking, what we say will be recorded on a tape. This is so later I can listen again and write down your ideas.

Will my taking part be anonymous?

Yes. All information about yours and your child's participation in the study will be anonymized. I will use a special code on the tape so that only I know that it's yours. The tapes will be kept in a locked cabinet so no one else can listen to them.

What will happen to the results of the study?

I will type up what you say in our meeting and send you a copy so that you can read it and let me know if you want to add something or change anything. Then I will write up a report which brings together all of the information I have in order to identify how to help children living in guardianship to feel a sense of school belonging. If you are interested in reading this report I will be able to give you access to it.

What if there's a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of the study at any point, you should contact me lr411@exeter.ac.uk and I will do my best to answer your questions. Alternatively, you may prefer to contact my supervisor B.Norwich@exeter.ac.uk

Will information about me be kept safely?

Yes. Information will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and I have your name and address removed so you cannot be recognised from it. It will be destroyed after five years following completion of the project.

Thank you for reading.

Guardian Consent Form

A research study towards a doctoral thesis: Lata Ramoutar (BSc PGCE MSc MBA CPsychol)
I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

I understand that:

- My participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw up until I have agreed the transcript of my interview, without giving a reason, by contacting the researcher.
- If I have any concerns or questions about the research I would like to discuss, I can do so by contacting the researcher (details below). If I want to discuss these things with someone else, I can contact the researcher's supervisor (Brahm Norwich, B.Norwich@exeter.ac.uk, Tel: 01392 72XXXX)
- My participation, email address and phone number (where provided) will be kept strictly confidential. My contact details will be kept separately for my interview data and all my data will be held in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations (2018) and destroyed after five years.
- My interview date will be held and used on an anonymous basis, with no mention of my name, but reference only to the group of which I am a member.
- If we have a discussion that is recorded, my interview tape and transcript will be held in confidence and not be used other than for the purposes described in the information sheet. Third parties will not be allowed to access them (except as may be required by the law). However, I will be supplied with a copy of my interview transcript so that I can comment on and edit it as I see fit (please give your email below).

I agree to take part in the above study and to the use of my data for the purposes specified above.

Name of participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature (if sending by post otherwise name above is sufficient): _____

Name of researcher: Lata Ramoutar

Date:

Email: lr411@exeter.ac.uk

Tel: 07787 XXXXXX

Address: NC109, St Luke's Campus, College of Social Sciences, Exeter University, Devon, UK.

Alternative contact: Brahm Norwich (supervisor) b.norwich@exeter.ac.uk

Appendix VI - Information and consent: Young person

Hi, I'm Lata Ramoutar and I am doing some research about school and how people feel they belong. I would like you to take part because you live with adults who are your guardians. Before you decide if you want to take part, take a look at this sheet which tells you about the study.

What is the study about? This study is trying to find out about the school experiences of young people who live with a guardian and what sorts of things help them to feel like they belong in their schools. I am asking about 10 young people altogether.

Do I have to Take Part? No. It's totally up to you. If you decide you would like to take part, you will need to sign a form to say you are happy to take part. Even if you sign the form you can change your mind and stop if you want to.

Can I ask questions before I decide? Yes. My contact details are at the end of this letter and you can ask me about anything you are not sure about. If you meet me you can ask me questions then as well.

What will happen if I agree to take part? If you agree to take part you will need to sign a form that says you agree to take part. After that I will meet with you in school for about 45 minutes. We will meet privately twice in your school. I would like to find out about what you think about different things in school: the things that you enjoy and don't enjoy, how you and your friends get on at school, how adults or teachers help. I am interested in finding out what helps you to feel like you 'belong' at that school...and maybe what doesn't! While we are talking, what we say will be recorded on a tape. This is so later I can listen again and write down your ideas. I will ask you to draw a really simple picture for me and we will talk about this together.

If you want we can meet once more with your guardian and a teacher or just with me to talk about the research together but you can decide about that later.

Will this be private? Yes. Only you, your guardian and a member of staff at your school will know you are taking part in this study. I will use a special code on the tape so that only I know that it's yours. The tapes will be kept in a locked cabinet so no one else can listen to them. The only time I will have to tell someone about you is if I'm worried that you are not safe. I will tell you I need to talk to someone. I will NOT talk about you behind your back.

What will happen to the information I collect? I am going to write about what I find out from you and the other young people. Remember it will be private so no one will know it was you who said it. I will tell other adults and professionals about ways to help young people feel like they belong at school and why this is important. If you or your guardian want to know what I have found out I will tell you.

What if there is a problem? If you have any worries about the study, you can ask your guardian or someone at school to call or email me so you can speak to me.

Young person to **circle** all they agree with:

Has someone explained this project to you?	YES/NO
Do you understand what this project is about?	YES/NO
Have you asked all the questions you want?	YES/NO
Have you had your questions answered in a way you understand?	YES/NO
Do you understand it's OK to stop taking part at any time?	YES/NO
Are you clear about what will happen with the information you give?	YES/NO
Are you happy to take part?	YES/NO

If any answers are 'no' or you don't want to take part, don't sign your name.
If you do want to take part, please write your name below:

Your name: _____

Date: _____

The person who explained this project needs to sign too:

Print name: _____

Sign name: _____

Date: _____

If you think of any more questions, you can contact me:

Lata Ramoutar lr411@exeter.ac.uk

Address: NC109, St Luke's Campus, College of Social Sciences, Exeter University, Devon, UK.

Alternative contact: Brahm Norwich (supervisor) b.norwich@exeter.ac.uk

Appendix VII - Information and consent: Designated teacher

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why research has been done what it will involve. Please take some time to read the following information carefully. Please ask there is anything it is not clear or if you would like more information.

The research has been conducted by Lata Ramoutar, educational psychologist. As part of a doctorate in education. Lotto has previous experience as the psychologist and teacher. The study has received full ethical clearance by the University of Exeter graduate School of education ethics committee.

What is the purpose of the study? This study aims to find out about the experiences of children who live in guardianship to help us understand and identify how they feel and belong at school. The information will be used to help to identify the needs of these children and meet them in school contexts.

Do I have to take part? No. It's up to you whether or not to take part. If you do, you will be given this information sheet to keep you will be asked to sign a consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time until you receive I typed copy of what you have told me and agreed it. You are free to withdraw up until this point and without giving a reason; all identifiable materials will be destroyed and your data will be removed from future analysis

What will happen if I take part? If you decide you'd like to take part in the study, you signed a consent form agreeing to participate then we will meet together for about an hour. This will involve you answering short and longer questions to gather information about your thoughts of your guardian at school. Our discussion may lead you thinking about things or thinking about things you hadn't given much thought to, hence you might learn something about yourself from experience, as well as providing the researcher with helpful insights.

Will my taking part the anonymous? Yes. All information about your and your child's participation in the study will be anonymised. What will happen to the results of the study? The data will be written up as part of a professional postgraduate training. It is hoped that the information will be used to help find ways of supporting children like yours at school to feel sense of belonging which will help them to lead to more positive outcomes. If you're interested in finding out about the study. The research would arrange a way to feed this back to you.

Will information about me be kept safely? Yes. Information will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and I have your name and address removed so you cannot be recognised from it. It will be destroyed after five years following completion of the project.

What if there's a problem? If you have a concern about any aspect of the study, you should contact me, the researcher Lr411@exeter.ac.uk or my supervisor Brahm Norwich, B.Norwich@exeter.ac.uk, Tel: 01392 72XXXX

A research study towards a doctoral thesis: Lata Ramoutar (BSc PGCE MSc MBA CPsychol)

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. I understand that:

- My participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw up until I have agreed the transcript of my interview, without giving a reason, by contacting the researcher.
- If I have any concerns or questions about the research I would like to discuss, I can do so by contacting the researcher (details below). If I want to discuss these things with someone else, I can contact the researcher's supervisor (Brahm Norwich, B.Norwich@exeter.ac.uk, Tel: 01392 72XXXX)
- My participation, email address and phone number (where provided) will be kept strictly confidential. My contact details will be kept separately for my interview data and all my data will be held in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations (2018) and destroyed after five years.
- My interview date will be held and used on an anonymous basis, with no mention of my name, but reference only to the group of which I am a member.
- If we have a discussion that is recorded, my interview tape and transcript will be held in confidence and not be used other than for the purposes described in the information sheet. Third parties will not be allowed to access them (except as may be required by the law). However, I will be supplied with a copy of my interview transcript so that I can comment on and edit it as I see fit (please give your email below).

I agree to take part in the above study and to the use of my data for the purposes specified above.

Name of participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature (if sending by post otherwise name above is sufficient): _____

Name of researcher: Lata Ramoutar

Date:

Email: lr411@exeter.ac.uk

Tel: 07787 XXXXXX

Address: NC109, St Luke's Campus, College of Social Sciences, Exeter University, Devon, UK.

Alternative contact: Brahm Norwich (supervisor) b.norwich@exeter.ac.uk

Appendix VIII - Example of Clare's NVivo transcript with coded sections in grey

Clare: Well sometimes, they understand but not really...occasionally

Me: and will they ask you to repeat things when they don't understand?

Clare: No. I find it difficult to talk sometimes.

Me: Ok So in your picture that's when you belong. What else is happening when you belong?

Clare: I get different support people. I get different support. They help me do a lot of things but I can't remember that.

Me: Do they sit next to you or walk around?

Clare: Sometimes I see them and talk about my body image. Not in class.

Me: No, is that private?

Clare: Yes. They don't know about that one. I do talk with some here because sometimes they want to talk about things. I'm a school kid but sometimes I'm a karate kid.

Me: I'm thinking you are saying karate kids. Is that a film?

Clare: Yes, I used to do karate for a long time for my own confidence.

Me: Wow. Did you belong in karate?

Clare: Yes

Me: What was it that made you feel like you belonged?

Clare: I belonged to a person but I can't really remember what they are called.

Me: Was that person your teacher?

Clare: Like a teacher but a different type

Me: Were you in a group of children learning karate?

Clare: I used to do it at my old school

Me: Did you like your old school?

Clare: Yes, I miss it.

Me: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

Clare: I want to visit but I am poorly. I have got a sore hip. I can't walk.

Me: Have you visited?

Clare: No, not yet

Me: But you would like to?

Clare: Yes

Me: Who would you like to see there?

Clare: My teacher, my other people, my PE teacher and new people there. I've been to (school for children with complex needs).

Me: You've been to (school for children with complex needs) and are there people there that you know?

Clare: Yeah, from this school.

Me: And your nan said you go to (club for children with complex needs).

Clare: Yes. That's a club

Me: Have you got friends there?

Clare: Yes. I can't really remember their names yet

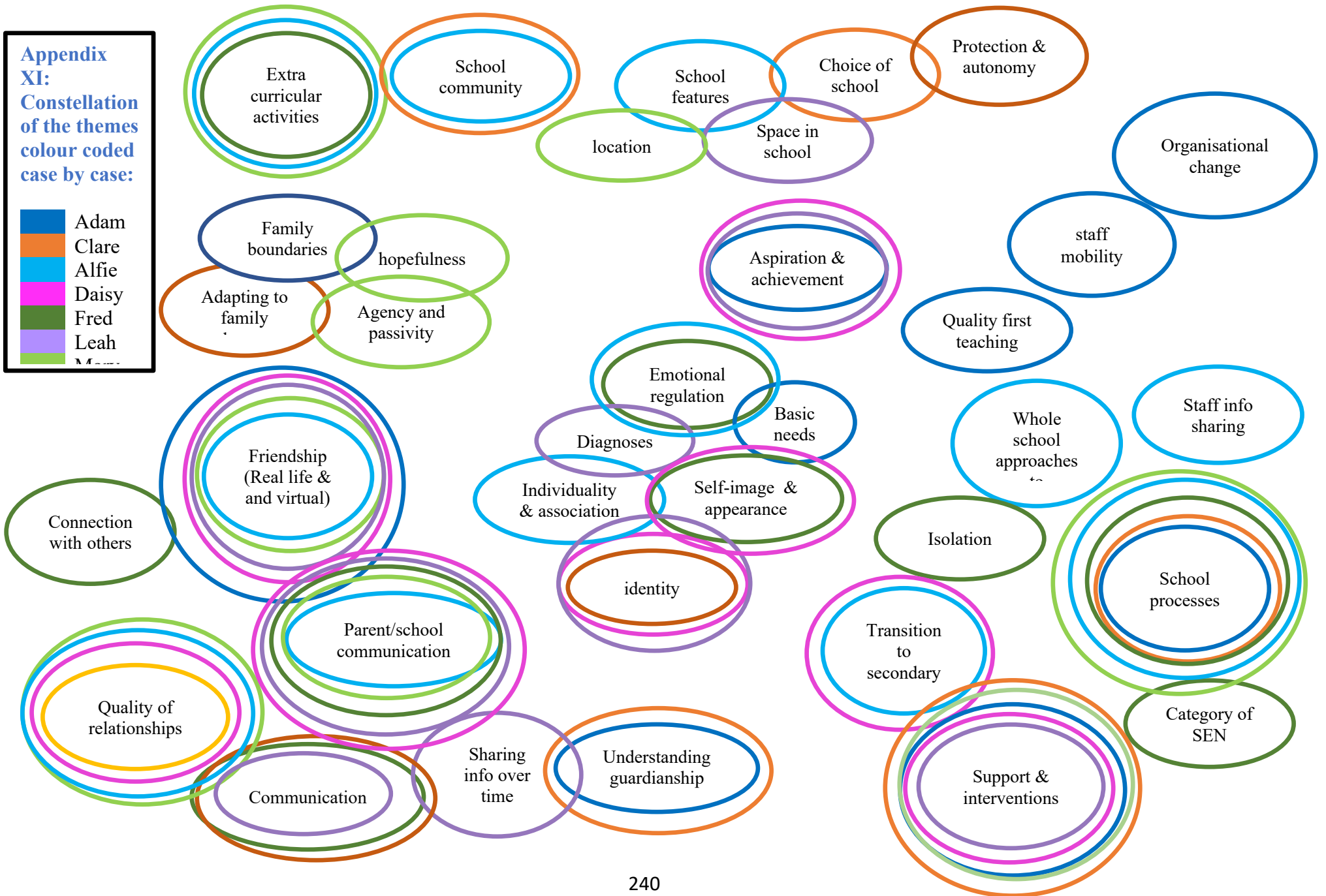
Me: But you have got friends there and they like you. Great.

Appendix IX - Example of NVivo codebook for Adam

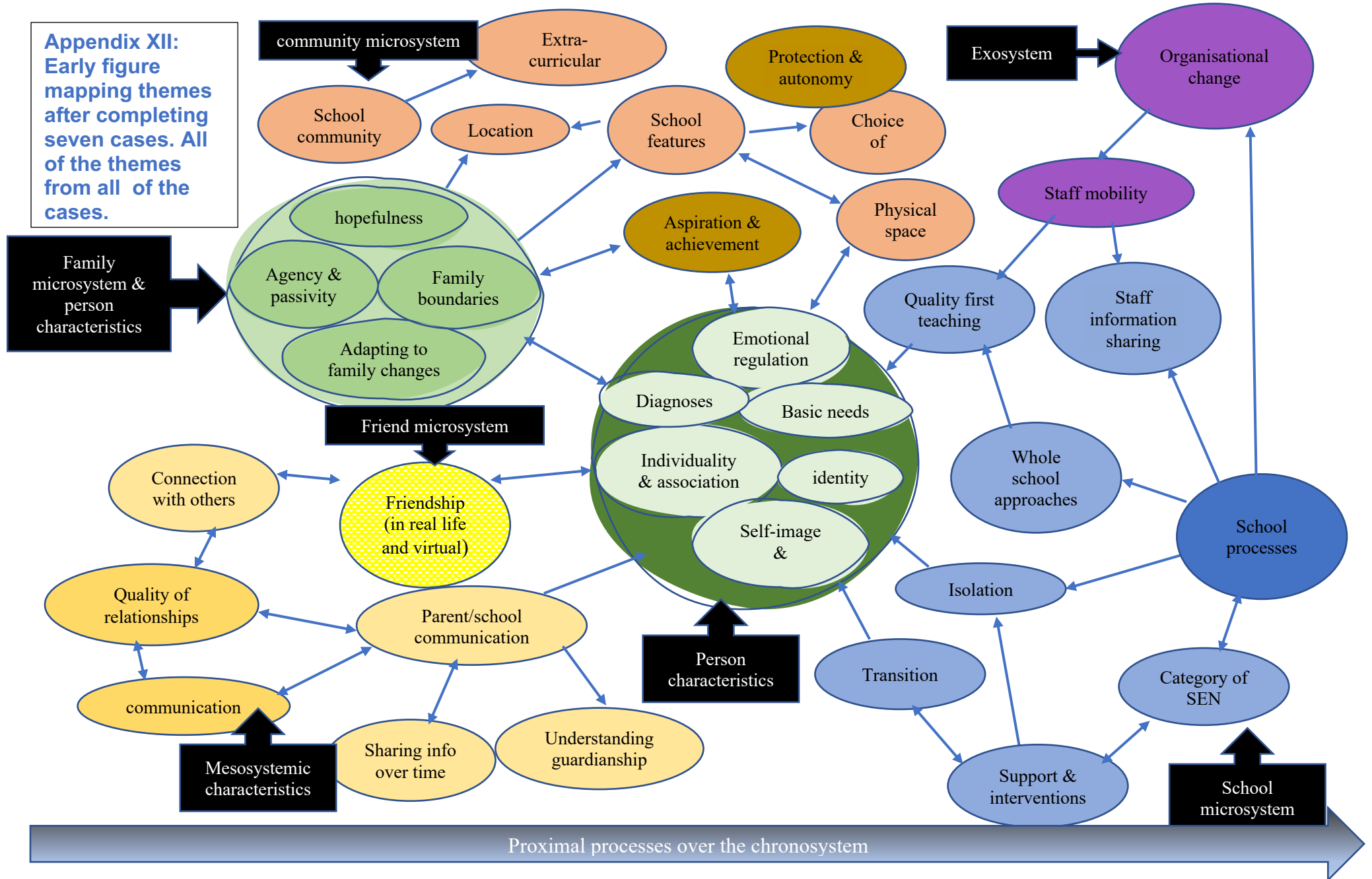
Name	Description	Files	References
Academy influence		1	1
Activities		2	6
Extra-curricular		1	4
Agency		2	3
Building		1	8
place		1	4
state		1	1
home school links		2	7
Identity		1	1
emotional needs		2	13
Peers		2	13
characteristics of peers		1	1
same narrative		1	3
Relationships		0	0
birth parents		1	5
contact		1	1
feelings of child		1	1
needs		1	3
family location		1	1
guardian		2	6
pets		1	1
siblings		1	3
School		1	1
achievement and progress		2	7
community		1	4
feeling safe		1	4
food		2	6
information sharing		1	12
outside		2	3
relationships		2	7
teacher		1	3
teaching assistant		2	4
SENCo and DT		1	8
knowledge of guardianship		1	8
support		1	13
social skills		1	2
training		1	3

**Appendix XI:
Constellation of the themes colour coded case by case:**

Blue	Adam
Orange	Clare
Cyan	Alfie
Magenta	Daisy
Green	Fred
Purple	Leah
Light Green	Maria



Appendix XII:
Early figure
mapping themes
after completing
seven cases. All
of the themes
from all of the
cases.



Appendix XIII: Reflections on process

Epistemologically, this research adopted a social constructionist perspective, in which the participants and I are seen as collaborators in the construction of knowledge. I acknowledge that my analysis and interpretation has been negotiated through my voice and that no research can be truly neutral from the researcher. Overall, I consider this to be a strength of the study because my professional experience as an EP supports the authenticity of the claims made in this work, resulting in a deep and rich analysis

My professional experience has developed my ability to interpret and understand complex social phenomenon and given me professional insight and experience of school systems which was critical for accurate interpretation of the data.

However, during the course of the study I became aware of important differences between my professional role as an EP and my role as researcher. Although the school context and interviewing young people and adults was extremely familiar, the function and expected outcomes of the interviews were different. As an EP, I approach most conversations in schools with an intention of joint problem solving, but the research interviews had an alternative agenda, and mediating through discussion between home-school contexts was not the aim. I reflected that hearing the participants experiences without being able to help or to provide hope was personally difficult and made the process of data collection uncomfortable at times. Particularly as some of the content of the interviews was quite harrowing and in different circumstances there would be a role for EP involvement.

In future, within my role as an academic and professional tutor at the University of Exeter on the EP doctoral training, I would like the curriculum to develop more focus on positionality and the difference between researcher and EP in role identity.

Appendix XIV: Proposed research timeline (In March 2020 this was revised because of the pandemic – last column shows actual completion)

	Nov-18	Dec-18	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jul-20	
research design	Green	Green																			
research proposal	Green	Green																			
ethics approval		Blue																			
literature review			Light Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue																
introduction																			Light Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue
methodology						Blue	Blue														
find participants				Light Green	Light Green	Light Green															
Interview guardians					Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green										
interview pupils					Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green										
interview teachers					Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green										
3 way meetings							Black	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black
transcribe							Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
transcripts returned												Light Green	Light Green								
thematic analysis									Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue
case studies															Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
discussion																			Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
submit draft																				Blue	Blue
Regular supervision, reflective diary, discussion with colleagues																					Light Purple