

Designated teachers' experiences of supporting previously looked after children in primary school settings: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) study.

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Abstract

The aim of this research was to explore Designated Teachers' (DTs) experiences of supporting Previously Looked After Children. The purpose of this research was to gain insight into how DTs experience their evolving role in order to better understand how the role can be supported and developed at the individual, school and Local Authority (LA) level to improve outcomes for Previously Looked After Children.

The role of the Designated Teacher was established in 2009 to promote the educational achievement of Looked After Children, in maintained schools in England and Wales. In 2018 this statutory requirement was extended to include Previously Looked After Children, who after leaving local authority care, have been adopted, made subject to a Special Guardianship Order, or made subject to a Child Arrangement Order.

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with three Designated Teachers working within primary schools. The participants were selected purposefully, ensuring that participants met specific sampling criteria which would allow them to reflect upon their experiences of supporting Previously Looked After Children.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was adopted as the methodological approach and four superordinate themes emerged from the analysis. The DTs explored the idea of working in 'the overlooked role' in relation to their working relationships with others. Further to this, the DTs highlighted their role in 'focusing on the child', stressing the importance of developing a holistic picture of the child, their needs and required support. In addition, the DTs highlighted the importance of 'increasing capacity', detailing the importance of personal and staff development.

Finally, the DTs explored the importance of 'working collaboratively', indicating the significance of working in partnership with parents and carers.

The findings were discussed in relation to the relevant existing literature and practice, with conclusions, limitations and recommendations also presented. The conclusions will be presented to Local Authority staff, including the Educational Psychology Service to offer more nuanced support and guidance to Designated Teachers and the Virtual School.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

This study is UK based and focuses on policy, legislation and practice within the English and Welsh education and legislative contexts.

1.1 Overview of the Chapter

The research in this study explores Designated Teachers (DTs) experiences of supporting previously looked after children (PLAC) within primary schools. Therefore, this chapter will introduce and define the key aspects of the experience of looked after and previously looked after children, including legal statuses and adverse childhood experiences. The national context is outlined with regards to the outcomes for looked after and previously looked after children, Government initiatives and relevant legislation. The local context is also explored with regards to the characteristics of looked after and previously looked after children in the county within which the research takes place. My position as a researcher and the rationale for this study will conclude this chapter.

1.2 Definitions of Looked After and Previously Looked After Children

The terms Looked After Child (LAC), Child Looked After (CLA), and Child in Care (CiC) are often used interchangeably to describe children who are looked after by the Local Authority (LA), [*the term Looked After Child - LAC will henceforth be used in this report*]. The Children Act 1989 [CA] provides the following definition of a looked after child:

“A child is looked after by a local authority if he or she falls into one of the following:

- is provided with accommodation, for a continuous period of more than 24 hours, (CA, 1989, s.20 and s.21)
- is subject to a care order (Children Act 1989)
- is subject to a placement order”

“A child is looked after by their LA if s/he is in their care or provided with accommodation for more than 24 hours by the authority” (CA, 1989, s.20).

Children will typically initially be accommodated under s.20 CA (1989). Children accommodated under s.20 are done so on a voluntary basis, fulfilling the duty of the LA to provide accommodation for ‘children in need’ (CA, 1989, s.20). The legislation indicates that “the LA shall provide accommodation for any child in their area who appears to require accommodation as a result of:

- (a) there being no person who has parental responsibility for him;
- (b) his being lost or having been abandoned; or
- (c) the person who has been caring for him being prevented (whether or not permanently, and for whatever reason) from providing him with suitable accommodation or care” (CA, 1989, s.20).

The LA does not need to seek the permission of the court and can place children with their extended family or friends, an approved foster-carer, or into residential care. Parents retain parental responsibility and at any time can remove their child from accommodation provided by the LA.

A court can make a child subject to a Care Order under s.31 of the CA (1989).

Children subject to a s.31 order are placed under the care of a designated local authority, with parental responsibility being shared between the parents and the local authority.

Under the Act, a court may only make a care order if it is satisfied:

- (a) that the child concerned is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm; and
- (b) that the harm, or likelihood of harm, is attributable to—

- (i) the care given to the child, or likely to be given to him if the order were not made, not being what it would be reasonable to expect a parent to give to him; or
- (ii) the child being beyond parental control (CA, 1989, s.31).

For some children, the move into local authority care may only be for a brief period of time, however for others it may mean remaining under the care of the LA until they become an 'eligible child' at the age of 16. For children who leave care prior to this, they cease to be 'looked after' for several reasons; some return to their family of origin, some go on to live with others such as their extended family, friends or carers under a Special Guardianship Order (SGO); while others are made the subject of a Child Arrangement Order (CAO). Alternatively, children can be made the subject of an Adoption Order (AO) and their birth-parents' rights are terminated. Children who immediately after being in care as defined by the criteria above, become subject to an AO, CAO or SGO; are defined as Previously Looked After Children (PLAC).

1.3 Permanence

Within children's services the term 'permanence' relates to the 'emotional, physical and legal conditions that give looked after children a sense of security and continuity in their placements' (Thomas, 2013). Alongside this, permanence represents a commitment from the carers to their children, helps to foster a positive sense of identity and ensures that children have a "secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond and to give them a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging" (DfE, 2015b, p.19).

When a child becomes looked after, a Care Plan must be created. The most recent statutory guidance issued to LAs in respect of permanence planning (DfE, 2013a), reminds LAs of their duty to complete a plan for permanency by the time of the second care review. Planning for permanency may include considering a return to

their birth families where appropriate or long-term foster care; however, for other children, permanence may be achieved by way of the aforementioned child arrangements order, special guardianship order or adoption order. The table below outlines the legal differences between the three orders.

Table 1 *Permanence Legal Orders*

Type of Order	Length	Rights and Responsibilities
<p>Child Arrangements Order (CAO)</p> <p>These orders decide with whom a child is to live, spend time or otherwise have contact.</p>	<p>The 'residence' component lasts until the child reaches 18; the 'contact' component lasts until the child reaches 16, unless discharged by the court prior to then.</p>	<p>The granting of a child arrangement order to someone automatically gives him or her parental responsibility for the child if they do not already have it.</p>
<p>Special Guardianship Order (SGO)</p> <p>These orders place a child or young person to live with someone other than their parent(s) on a long-term basis.</p>	<p>Until the child reaches 18, unless discharged by the court prior to then. Except in exceptional circumstances, new SGOs should not be made in respect of young people aged 16 or 17.</p>	<p>The Special Guardian shares parental responsibility for the child with the birth parent(s), however they can make nearly all the major decisions about the child without having to consult them.</p>
<p>Adoption Order (AO)</p> <p>This is an order giving full parental responsibility for a child to the approved adopter(s); the adoptive parent(s) become the child's legal parent(s).</p>	<p>Adoption is a permanent and life-long arrangement.</p>	<p>Parental responsibility is transferred to the adoptive parent(s). The legal relationship between the child and the birth parent(s) will be broken.</p>

1.3.1 Adoption and its History

Adoption and fostering are said to have always existed in some guise in the UK; people taking other peoples children into their homes and looking after them temporarily or permanently. It was not until the 20th century however, that adoption began to be formalised and became part of statute law. The Adoption of Children Act (1926) provided the 'legal route for the permanent and secure transfer of orphans

and illegitimate children to new parents' (UK parliament, 2013), with further legislation not developed until the 1976 Adoption Act.

Adoption rates in England peaked in the 1960s with 25,000 children adopted in 1968. This number has fallen significantly and almost sixty years later in 2019, only 3,570 children were adopted (DfE, 2019a). The fall in adoption rates is perhaps representative of the changing attitudes in society; at its peak, 51% of adoptions were for babies and 92% for 'illegitimate children' (UK parliament, 2013). With societal changes in relation to the availability of contraception, legislation on abortion, financial support for single mothers and children with additional needs; very few babies are now relinquished at birth. Today most children are adopted from local authority care, with the majority of children removed from their birth families as a result of suffering from neglect or abuse (DfES, 2007).

1.3.2 Special Guardianship

Special guardianship was introduced by the Adoption and Children Act 2002 as an amendment to the Children Act 1989 and was implemented on the 30th of December 2005. In 2000, the Adoption White Paper (DHSC, 2000) noted that "family members were the preferred choice [for placement] where it is possible and consistent with the child's welfare" (para 5.4). This White Paper identified the need for a new legal order for children who were unable to live with their parents, but where an Adoption Order may not be the most appropriate outcome. This type of order intended to provide greater legal security for children than they would have in long-term foster care and grant Special Guardians parental responsibility, without severing the child's legal ties to their birth family. This may be particularly relevant for older children, children cared for permanently by members of their wider birth families, unaccompanied asylum seekers with strong attachments to their families abroad and those who

object to adoption on religious or cultural grounds. The granting of an SGO also provides guardians with access to support, including financial support where appropriate (DfE, 2017).

Recent statistics from England (DfE, 2019a) indicate that of the 78,150 children who were looked after in 2018-19, 3,830 ceased to be looked after due to being made the subject of an SGO. Most SGOs (59%) were granted to relative or family-friend foster-carers of the child, while 31% were made to family and friends who prior to the order being made, had been the child's carer. Of the remaining total, 9% of orders were made to foster-carers and 1% to carers, who were not relatives or family friends of the child prior to the order being made.

In 2018-19, most children were made subject to an SGO between the ages of 1-4 years old (36%), while a further 27% were made in respect of children age 5-9 years old. Only 17% of orders were made in respect of children aged under 1 and 18% were aged 10-15 years old. This indicates that most children who were made subject to an SGO were primary-school aged or younger, with an average age of 5 years 7 months (DfE, 2019a).

1.3.3 Child Arrangement Order

Child Arrangement Orders (CAOs) were introduced by the Children and Families Act 2014, amending the Children Act 1989 and replacing Contact Orders and Residence Orders (Sch.2). The aim of the CAO is to provide security for a child or young person, through legal permanence, where adoption or special guardianship is not appropriate (DfE, 2017). The order regulates arrangements relating to with whom the child should live, spend time or otherwise have contact; and when a child is to live, spend time or otherwise have contact with a person. Local Authority foster-carers or relatives are entitled to apply for a CAO if the child has lived with them for at least

one year immediately preceding the application. The 'residence' aspects of a CAO are in place until the child is 18, unless discharged by the court or upon the granting of a Care Order. The 'contact' aspect remains in place until the child is 16, except in the case of exceptional circumstances, where it may be extended until the child reaches 18 years of age (Sch.2 (4)).

The CAO has the advantage of granting parental responsibility to the carer (if they do not already have it), for the duration of the order, without discharging the parental responsibility of the child's parents. Further to this, the child will no longer be Looked After and will therefore only require involvement from Children's Services for a limited number of reasons. It does, however, have the disadvantage of being less legally secure than adoption or special guardianship, in that an application can be made to revoke the order and there are limited grounds for ongoing support for carers once the order has been made.

1.4 The National Picture and Attainment

The educational underachievement of LAC is well documented; in national tests, their scores on average are lower than their non-LAC peers, a gap which widens as they progress through school. In the 2019 KS2 tests, 49% of LAC reached the expected grade in reading, in comparison to 73% of their non-LAC peers. The greatest difference was observed in their maths scores; 48% of LAC achieved the expected grade in comparison to 79% of non-LAC pupils. When analysed by gender, girls who were Looked After were found to outperform their male counterparts, with the most significant difference found in writing; 52% of girls and only 33% of boys achieved the expected grades (DfE, 2020).

By the time that children reach their GCSE's in KS4, the attainment gap widens substantially. In 2018 59.4% of non-looked after children achieved at least a grade 4

in both English and maths, in comparison to just 17.5% of looked after children. In 2010, the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) was introduced as a performance measure for schools. At the time of its introduction, pupils were said to have achieved the EBacc if they scored at least a grade C across five core subjects. Looked after children were much less likely to be entered for the EBacc, 8.6% compared to 35% of their peers and those who were entered achieved a much lower average score, 1.47 compared to 3.83 (DfE, 2019b).

Previously looked after children are likely to have had similar early life experiences to LAC, however, there has been a misconception that once a child leaves the care system, that these difficulties cease to exist or impact on their learning (PAC-UK & DfE, 2017). The needs of these children do not change overnight; indeed 'their experiences in early life can have a lasting impact which can affect the child many years after adoption' (PAC-UK & DfE, 2017). With increased focus on the outcomes for all children, greater attention is now being paid to the educational outcomes for children who were previously looked after. As a result, in 2018 the government produced experimental statistics detailing the educational attainment of PLAC (DfE, 2019b), which are detailed in the Table 2 below.

Table 2 National attainment levels for LAC, PLAC and Non-LAC

	LAC	PLAC	Non-LAC
Percentage achieving expected grades in reading, writing and maths at the end of KS2	35%	40%	65%
Percentage achieving GCSE grades 9-4 in English and maths at the end of KS4	19%	31%	44%

The statistics suggest that by the time students reach KS2, the attainment gap between LAC, PLAC and their non-LAC peers is already evident. Significantly, the attainment gap between LAC and PLAC grows from 5% at KS2, to 12% by the end of KS4, suggesting that while achieving permanence (DfE, 2019b).

When the various groups within PLAC were compared, the outcomes (detailed in table 3) were similar between them, however the attainment levels suggesting a positive correlation between more formal types of permanence and greater attainment.

Table 3 Comparison of attainment rates at the end of KS4 by PLAC type

	Adoption Order	Special Guardianship Order	Child Arrangement Order
Percentage achieving GCSE grades 9-4 in English and maths at the end of KS4	37%	31%	30%

1.5 Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events occurring before the age of 18 and come in many different forms, including abuse, neglect and household dysfunction. In 1998, Kaiser-CDC published a ground-breaking study exploring the impact of experiencing 10 different types of ACEs prior to the age of 18 (CDC, 2019). The findings of the study showed a direct correlation between experiencing ACEs and future health complications. The term ACEs reflects the increased focus on and understanding of, the impact of a range of experiences on children's lives, aside from the more traditionally explored areas of adversity such as abuse or neglect.

There is currently limited research on the impact of ACEs on adopted children. Of the limited research that does exist the populations in question are overwhelmingly from the US or and although useful, the difference in pre-adoption experiences and processes may lead to different post-adoption outcomes (Anthony, Paine & Shelton, 2019). Mignot (2017) specifically highlights that within the UK, most children are adopted from LA care, few are adopted internationally, and private domestic adoptions are not utilised. In addition to this, studies typically utilise parents knowledge of pre-adoption experiences, which may be limited or unavailable. This may lead to an incomplete picture as to the degree of impact of pre-adoption experiences on post-adoption health and family support needs.

Children are highly dependent on their parents and guardians for their basic survival needs. While this level of need changes as they develop both physically and psychologically, this development however, is not sufficient to protect them from experiencing abuse and neglect. Studies of adult relationships have long queried why people do not leave abusive relationships (Strube & Barbour, 1984) however for children it can be almost impossible for them to leave abusive and neglectful homes.

There are two main ways in which children and young people at risk of harm are monitored by children's social care. Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 makes provision for a Child in Need (CiN) status, implementing a voluntary plan for families to support them by ensuring that they have the appropriate support to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child.

A child is considered 'in need' if:

- they are unlikely to achieve or maintain or to have the opportunity to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development without provision of services from the Local Authority;
- their health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision of services from the Local Authority;
- they have a disability.

For children regarded to be 'in need', but also suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm, LA children's services will initiate a strategy discussion to determine whether a Simpson.⁴⁷ (Children Act, 1989) investigation is necessary; and consider whether any immediate protective action is also required, including being made subject to a Child Protection (CP) Plan. The plan sets out what steps and provisions are needed to safeguard the child's welfare and minimize the risks of harm to the child.

In 2018-19 in England and Wales, 399,510 children were listed as CiN, of which 1.8% were for unborn children, 4.9% were under the age of 1, and 16.7% were aged between 1-4 years old. The 2018-19 figures for England and Wales also show that 52,260 children were subject to CP plans, of which 2.3% were for unborn children, 9.3% were under the age of 1 and 25% were aged between 1-4 years old (DfE, 2019c).

As highlighted by the statistics on the number of infants on CiN and CP plans, as well as LAC and PLAC (since the majority become looked after as a result of abuse or neglect); a significant minority of children experience early and often multiple traumas and losses, some starting to occur even prior to birth.

1.5.1 Impact on Brain Development

Allen (2011) suggests that while poor parenting can cause 'developmental damage' at any age, "the worst and deepest damage is done to children when their brains are being formed during their earliest months and years. The most serious damage takes place before birth and during the first 18 months of life" (p. 15). During this time the development of the part of the brain which governs emotional development occurs (Allen, 2011) and the foundations of this are heavily shaped by interactions with the primary carer.

Further to this Allen also suggest that infants are born with 25% of their brains developed, experiencing a rapid period of development until three years of age, by such time 80% of their brain is developed. He goes on to suggest that although development does not cease at this point, the impact of trauma and loss may be more significant prior to this age.

1.5.2 Executive Functioning

Executive functioning refers to the set of cognitive abilities necessary for coordinating and controlling cognitive abilities and behaviours (Diamond, 2013). There is a typical consensus that there are three executive functions- working memory, mental flexibility and self-control. The experience of trauma particularly where it is prolonged can lead to the disruption of the development of executive functioning skills.

Despite their importance, children are not born with these skills instead they are born with the capacity to develop these skills (Centre on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2011). Acquiring the initial foundations of these skills is one of the most important tasks of early childhood and is vital in the classroom, in areas such as learning to write, remembering the sequence of steps to solve math problems, or taking turns in a group discussion. Adults play a key role in helping children to develop these skills by providing appropriate frameworks and scaffolding for repeated practise and learning to take place.

Current public health initiatives focus on the need to reduce ACEs for all children, however, Adoption UK (2017) argues that “focus also needs to be maintained on those who have already been affected by severe abuse, neglect and trauma” (p. 11).

1.5.3 Risk, Resilience and the Role of Attachment

The link between care in the early years of life, later emotional development and life outcomes was first suggested by Bowlby (1969/1982). Bowlby introduced attachment theory as a way to make sense of the mother-infant relationship and defined attachment. Bowlby described instinctive attachment behaviours such as smiling or crying through which infants obtained the protection and proximity of adults both of which are vital for the infant survival; it is the ways in which the adults respond to these behaviours that affects the child's emotional development. For children who have experienced responsive parents who are sensitive to their needs they develop an internal working model in which they see themselves as loved and importantly to others lovable (Beek, 1999). The child learns that they can rely on their parents and seeks out the comfort of others. Many adopted children arrive at their new families “having been deprived of enormous amounts of physical or emotional and physical nurturing, in the weeks months or years prior to the child’s

adoption” (James, 2019 p.88). Morton and Browne (1998) caution that unpredictable or inconsistent parenting does not lead to ‘no attachment’; instead, for these children their traumatic experiences are reflected in their ‘insecure’ styles of attachment. The internal working model is that they are unlovable, and they cannot trust others, which impacts their ability to form relationships. Adopted children may struggle with forming secure attachments to their new parents and siblings (see Appendix 1 for types of attachment).

While the different types of insecure attachment may be indicative of later difficulties, they are not within themselves considered to be disorders (NICE, 2015). NICE contends that attachment disorders can be found in any setting, however as they are most likely to be the result of repeated changes of caregiver or neglectful caregivers; Adopted children are understandably at greater risk than the wider population. The likelihood of developing mental health difficulties in children aged 5 to 10 who have been in care is significantly higher (42%) than those who have not 8% (NICE, 2015) with similar figures for 11 to 15 year olds 49% (11%) respectively.

In their seminal research, Tronick and Gianino (1986) remind us that no parent can be attuned to their child 100% of the day, however these periods of mismatch between the infants expectation and their parents behaviour and the subsequent repair, help to develop confidence and resilience. They caution however, that where this repair does not take place, or the stress continues; the child begins to feel helpless, eventually giving up on their attempts at repair.

The success or lack thereof of these repair attempts affects the internal working model of the children. While securely attached children can change the model quite easily, Bowlby (1969/1982) suggested that for in securely attached children, these

negative models may persist even when they are no longer being treated in the way that caused the negative model to exist in the first place.

Matson and Coatsworth (1998) argue that “infant competence is embedded in the caregiving system” (p.208). In addition, they identify this period as the time for critical developmental tasks, including social competence with peers, socially appropriate conduct, academic achievement, and involvement in activities and work. To successfully complete these tasks, Matson and Coatsworth (1998) suggest that there are three crucial protective factors: caring and effective parent-child relationships, good cognitive development, and self-regulation of attention, emotion and behaviour. The absence of these protective factors increases the likelihood of the child experiencing emotional difficulties throughout their childhood and later life, however, factors such as resilience play a part in mitigating these risks.

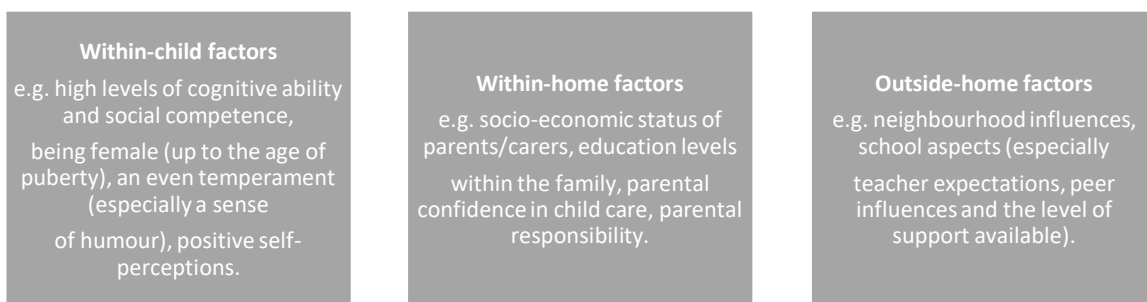
There are many definitions of resilience, however Rutter (2006) defines it as ‘an interactive concept that is concerned with the combination of serious risk experiences and a relatively positive psychological outcome, despite these experiences’ (p. 2). Gilligan (1997), describes resilience in respect of individual qualities, explaining that resilience is ‘those qualities which cushion a vulnerable child from the worst effects of adversity in whatsoever form it takes and which may help a child or young person to cope, survive and even thrive in the face of great hurt and disadvantage’ (p. 12).

Rutter (1994) suggest that resilience is not a matter of eliminating risk factors from a child’s life, instead the successful management of those factors is a resilience promoting factor in itself. Fergusson and Lynskey (1996) caution however, that while children may overcome or learn from single or moderate risk, when these factors

multiply, the children's capacity to manage, weakens. Furthermore, risk factors are cumulative; the presence of one risk factor increases the risk that another factor will emerge.

Most children who experience ACEs do not go on to develop poor health outcomes, due to a range of factors, including resilience. Sources of resilience include cultural engagement, community support, opportunity to control your personal circumstances and access to trusted adults. Fonagy *et al.* (1994) suggest that there are three general predictors of resilience, within-child factors, within-home factors and outside-home factors. Examples of these factors are detailed in figure 1 below.

Figure 1 *Resiliency factors in children*



In exploring the link between childhood resilience and ACEs, Bellis *et al.* (2018) surveyed adult respondents using questions from the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM). The scale consists of twelve items, including 'I had people to look up to' and 'I felt I belonged in my school'. They found that there was a positive relationship between having lower childhood resilience and experience of a higher number of ACEs. Conversely, those who reported having higher childhood resilience also reported experiencing a lower number of ACEs.

The application of resilience theory is particularly pertinent to vulnerable groups such as LAC (Bostock, 2004; Gilligan, 2004). Being LAC does not automatically result in a child or young person not being able to do well, however research has consistently

shown that LAC tend to have poorer outcomes in respect of health, education and substance misuse and subsequent employment. It is important therefore that measures are taken to identify and support the development of resiliency in both LAC and PLAC.

1.6 Support for Looked After and Previously Looked After Children

Due to the wealth of research and statistics that highlight the achievement gap for LAC and a growing body of research in respect to PLAC, there have been a raft of Government initiatives and supporting legislative changes to bring about improvements in support. This included Care Matters: Time for Change (DfES, 2007) which at the time was heralded as the most significant piece of government policy affecting England's looked-after children, since the beginning of the decade.

Local authorities have a duty under s.22(3A) of the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Children Act 2004, to safeguard and promote the welfare of children looked after by them, including a particular duty to promote the child's educational achievement.

There are five main policy systems in place to support LAC and PLAC in England-

- Personal Education Plans (PEPs) [LAC only]
- Education Plan for Adopted Children (EPAC) [PLAC only]
- The Virtual School and The Virtual School Head
- Pupil Premium
- The Adoption Support Fund (AO and SGO only)
- The Designated Teacher

1.6.1 Personal Education Plan (PEP)

As part of the requirement to promote educational achievement, the Act placed a duty on LAs to provide a PEP for all LAC. At the time it was felt that the existing care plans and statutory reviews had not been sufficient in promoting and prioritising the

education of LAC (DCSF, 2010). Thus, PEPs were designed to ensure access to the appropriate services and support.

The PEP is an individual plan designed to focus on the actions that are required for the child or young person to fulfil their potential. The format of the PEP differs between LAs, however, it should always include the pupils' needs and achievements, academic targets, future plans and the support that will be needed. The PEP should be started within 10 days of a child becoming LAC and as a living document, should be developed and reviewed on at least a six-monthly basis with the DT, child or young person, social worker, carer and a representative from the virtual school. Once created, the DT is responsible for leading on the development, implementation and monitoring of the PEP within the school. Where the young person is not on track to meet their targets, the DT should agree the best way forward to support them to do so.

Over time, the PEP becomes a continuous record of the child's school history, however, once they transition to PLAC, there is no statutory requirement for the process to be continued.

1.6.2 Education Plan for Adopted Children

In the absence of an established method of information sharing, the Education Plan for Adopted Children (EPAC) (Osborne, Norgate & Traill, 2009) was developed. The aim of the EPAC is to ensure that "staff within schools remain aware of the needs and issues faced by adopted children and their families and adapt their provision accordingly" (Syne, Green & Dyer, 2012, p.96). The EPAC is based on the concept of the PEP however in contrast to the PEP it is not a statutory requirement and requires parental agreement to be implemented.

The EPAC can be used to aid schools to have conversations with parents about particularly sensitive topics or "things that were not usually disclosed, in a supportive,

planned manner” (Syne et al., 2012, p.98). The adoption order can be applied for once a child has lived with their adoptive family for at least 10 weeks, however, statistics suggest that most families have the adoption order approved sometime later. Whilst awaiting the adoption order, children are still considered LAC and continue to have PEP meetings. Syne and colleagues suggest that the EPAC be used alongside the PEP to help plan for the child's transition to plaque and the interaction between the child family and school. In their study Hampshire County Council (2019) found that in respect of ongoing discussion and planning between the home and the school, an EPAC was completed for one quarter of the children, however the findings also noted that children with SEN they were more likely (66%) to have a completed EPAC.

1.6.3 Virtual School

Among the initiatives implemented to support the educational needs of LAC was the Virtual School. This was initially piloted in 11 LA areas between 2007-2009, following recommendations made in the White Paper – Care Matters: Time for Change (DfES, 2007). Virtual schools are not physical buildings; they are teams of LA staff led by a senior LA manager, namely the Virtual School Head (VSH), and work with children as if they attended one school. To do this, VSHs are expected to liaise with the school each child attends, tracking their progress to help them to achieve as well as possible. Further to this, VSHs need to ensure that schools know which of the children on their roll are LAC; ensure that all LAC are supported through a Personal Education Plan (PEP); and lead on devising and delivering relevant training about the needs of LAC (Ofsted, 2012).

1.6.4 Pupil Premium Plus

Pupil premium (PP) was introduced in 2011 to provide schools with additional financial support, for children eligible for free school meals, children of parents

serving in the armed forces and looked after children. The purpose of PP was to help close the attainment gap between these groups and their peers. In April, 2012 PP was extended to all children who had been eligible for free school meals at any point in the previous six years (DfE, 2013b). In 2013 the DfE introduced Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) specifically for LAC and PLAC (DfE, 2019d). By widening the scope of the funding, the government acknowledged the enduring impact of trauma and loss in children's lives and the key role of schools in supporting children who have had a difficult start in life (PAC-UK, 2016). Initially PP+ was restricted to children adopted on or after 30th of December 2005, however in 2014 this was extended to all adopted children. In 2019, the rates for each child eligible for PP+ was £2300 per annum.

Virtual schools are responsible for managing the PP+ for LAC and for allocating the funds to schools and alternative provisions; each virtual school has its own system for doing this. The DT should set out in the PEP how they intend to use the PP+. Each virtual school is required to publish a clear policy on their use of PP+, including the level and use of any funding which is top-sliced to provide support at a LA level, to pay for activities such as training for DT's.

Pupil Premium Plus for PLAC is allocated to and managed directly by each individual school. To enable schools to access the funding, parents and guardians must notify the school of their child's adoptive, special guardianship or child arrangements status prior to the school completing the January census. Designated Teachers should help to raise the awareness amongst the carers and guardians of PLAC, about the importance of declaring their child's status (DfE, 2018a). Once made aware, DTs can access the relevant enhanced support to which the children are entitled.

Pupil Premium Plus money is not ring-fenced and does not have to be spent on an individual child. This is to allow for sufficient flexibility in how the funds are spent, to ensure it has the maximum impact on eligible children and their educational achievement. Schools are responsible for how they spend their respective premium funding allocations, however the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (EEF, 2019) recommends taking a tiered approach to spending, allocating money to- improving teaching (i.e. professional development); targeted academic support (i.e. structured interventions); and wider strategies (i.e. behaviour approaches to support the children).

1.6.5 The Adoption Support Fund

The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) provides funds for LAs and Registered Adoption Agencies (RAAs) to pay for therapeutic services for eligible adoptive and special guardianship families (Matthew, Hahne & King, 2019). It was introduced in England in May 2015, following prototype testing in 10 LAs between June 2014-May 2015. On an annual basis, each child can be funded to a maximum of £2,500 for a specialist assessment and £5,000 for therapy. Between May 2015 and August 2018, over 25,000 applications were made to the fund, representing 31,000 families and 41,000 families. The most common types of support funded were therapeutic parenting training, psychotherapy, creative therapies and further specialist assessments (Matthew et al., 2019).

1.6.6 The Designated Teacher

As highlighted, there are a number of factors that contribute to the significantly poorer outcomes experienced by care-experienced children. As a result of their often complex needs, there are typically several adults involved in their care, making liaison between agencies difficult, especially with schools. Many schools have limited experience of the needs of LAC, especially where they have limited experience of

having LAC on roll. To address these challenges, non-statutory guidance was issued in 2000 which recommended that all schools designate a teacher with responsibility for championing the needs of educational attainment of LAC (DfEE, 2000).

Research undertaken by the Social Exclusion Unit in 2003 (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003) indicated that most schools had designated a member of staff to fulfil this role, however there were concerns that they were not always a teacher and there were wide variations between schools regarding the effectiveness of the role.

To ensure greater consistency between schools, in 2008 the Children and Families Act directed schools to ensure that the role was undertaken by a qualified teacher, headteacher or acting headteacher, ensuring that DTs have sufficient seniority to effect change.

The duties of the DT were originally set out by the 2008 legislation and the 2009 guidance document, 'The Role and Responsibilities of the Designated Teacher for Looked After Children' (DfCSF, 2009). The guidance suggested that the DT should make sure that there is an initial central point of contact within the school, ensuring that joined-up arrangements are in place to minimise disruption to a child's learning. Further to this, it was suggested that the DT should take on a leadership role in promoting the educational achievement of LAC and promote a whole school culture where the personalised needs of LAC matter and their personal, emotional and academic needs are prioritised.

In 2017 in a joint report with PAC-UK (PAC-UK & DfE, 2017), the Government highlighted that the "needs of previously looked after children do not change overnight and they do not stop being vulnerable just because they are in a loving home" (p.24).

The results of the trauma and difficulties they have experienced are likely to have ongoing and for many, lifelong effects. Following the recognition of the need to provide extra support for LAC for these very same reasons and some LAs opting to do so voluntarily; the Government acknowledged the need to provide statutory guidance for schools. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced an amendment to the 2008 Act, setting out a statutory requirement to extend the role of the DT to include previously looked after children. The document, 'The designated teacher for looked after and previously looked-after children' (DfE, 2018a) sets out the statutory expectations related to the roles and responsibilities of the DT, including providing an overview of the role and how the DT should work with others to support both LAC and PLAC at their schools. Designated Teachers have a key role in the day-to-day support the educational achievement of LAC and PLAC and the guidance suggests that this can be done by the DT:

- Contributing to the development and review of whole school policies and procedures;
- Promoting a supportive culture for looked-after and previously looked-after children;
- Being a source of advice for teachers;
- Working directly with looked-after and previously looked-after children and their carers, parents or guardians;
- Having lead responsibility for the development and implementation of looked after children's PEP within school in partnership with others as necessary; and
- Working closely with the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead to ensure that any safeguarding concerns regarding looked-after and previously looked-after children are quickly and effectively responded to.

1.7 The Local Context

In the County within which the research took place, there were around 1,500 LAC in the year 2018-19, of which nearly a third began their LAC status during the year, with the majority – 65% becoming looked after as a result of abuse or neglect. Of the total amount of LAC, approximately 8% were adopted or permanently placed. A breakdown of these figures highlights that 78% became previously looked after through adoption and 20% through special guardianship. These figures indicate that the numbers of children leaving care through these avenues is relatively small; with child arrangement orders accounting for 7 children in 2016/17, 6 in 2017/18 and 3 in 2018/19, reducing the likelihood that local schools would have experience of supporting children subject to these orders. Table 4 outlines the comparison of educational attainment for local LAC, national LAC and local non-LAC children.

Table 4 *Educational attainment for LAC and Non-LAC 2018-19*

	Local Authority LAC	National LAC	Local Authority Non-LAC
Percent achieving expected level in reading at KS2	50%	49%	75%
Percent achieving GCSE grades 9-4 in both English and maths at KS4	22%	18%	63.9%
Percent with SEN with an EHCP.	33%	27%	3.4%

Wider outcomes for LAC suggest that 45% of local care leavers aged 19-21 are NEET, compared to 39% of care leavers nationally and 13% of 19-21 years olds in the general population. Research exploring the characteristics of young people who are long-term NEET (not in education, employment or training for three years after

completing key stage 4) highlighted that in comparison to other characteristics of vulnerability, young people who were LAC were the group most likely to be NEET and in turn, were more likely to be NEET for longer (DfE, 2018b).

1.8 The Relevance to the Educational Psychologist

Educational Psychologists are well placed to support the needs of LAC and PLAC in educational settings (Jackson & McParlin, 2006). A review of the EP role (SEED, 2002) identified that the core functions of an EP are consultation, assessment, intervention and research and training, with EPs operating at the individual, group and organisational levels. In 2006 the DECP (DECP, 2006) published a report scrutinising the work of the EPs supporting LAC and adopted children. This study was conducted from the perspective of EPs in designated posts for LAC. The findings suggested that EPs have a role in understanding the factors which impact confidence, emotional wellbeing, the impact of difficult early life experiences and an understanding of how children learn.

At an individual level, EPs can undertake assessments or provide consultation exploring the needs of a child or young person. At a group level, EPs are well placed to undertake tasks such as running group supervision sessions for teachers, or training to support their understanding of the social and emotional needs of care-experienced children. Finally, EPs work at the systemic level to support schools to develop their wider practice to support children and young people, such as implementing school-wide policies and exploring the impact of behaviour policies in relation to attachment and trauma.

Due to their knowledge of child development, the impact of attachment and ACEs, Educational Psychologists are uniquely positioned to support the development of those responsible for promoting the education of PLAC. This work is undertaken at

all three levels highlighted above. EPs work alongside colleagues from agencies such as health, education, social care and are able to provide a uniquely psychological perspective on any of these areas in multi-agency work.

1.9 Researcher Positioning

My interest in LAC and PLAC has been influenced by previous roles working with children and young people who were looked after, previously looked after or leaving care. In one such role, as a Participation Officer, I helped to establish and facilitate a Local Authority Children in Care Council (CiCC), an initiative set up as a result of recommendations in the Government's White Paper Care Matters: Time for Change (DfES, 2007) and later made statutory by the Secretary of State in 2009. In this role I supported looked after children and young people in leaving care to engage with a range of professionals in children's services, including senior management and political leaders. I saw first-hand the importance of supporting the children and young people to have a voice, as well as the value of liaising with a range of professionals and the importance of advocating on their behalf. The children and young people I worked with ranged in age from six to seventeen years of age and had a range of care experiences, including living with foster carers since birth; becoming LAC as the result of parental death; being accommodated in a series of children's homes; living with their extended family; and those awaiting formal adoption. The CiCC members were not a homogenous group, they differed in many ways; however, all had the experience of the loss of their birth families and the related trauma. Discussions between myself and those who were subject to adoption orders, revealed both anticipation and fear, as well as complex feelings about identity that were often difficult to articulate to the many professionals in their lives. Whilst the act of 'leaving care' through adoption was widely seen by the children and young people as

positive, none of them viewed it as a 'magic wand', capable of erasing their prior life experiences. Within youth justice, I worked with several children and young people who were PLAC, gaining an insight into the difficulties they were facing, despite being settled within their new, permanent families.

My experience working with LAC, PLAC and young people leaving care provided opportunity for me to work with them at an individual level, however, the work also allowed for close engagement with a range of professionals tasked with a statutory responsibility for their care, including Designated Teachers for LAC. The importance of this role for LAC led me to wonder how the extension of the work to include PLAC was experienced by the DTs.

Due to my experience and interest in this area and in recognition of the key role DTs play in the lives of vulnerable children; I am keen to provide an opportunity for the voices of DTs to be heard widely and in a meaningful way by those with whom they work.

1.10 Rationale for the Current Study

There is increasing recognition that when a child or young person leaves care through adoption, special guardianship, or a child arrangement order, that their needs do not suddenly disappear upon the granting of permanency. Indeed, for many, their early life events increase the likelihood that they will experience difficulties in relation to social, emotional and mental health, SEN and low attainment. Achieving permanence may mean moving to a new area and a new school, sometimes in a short space of time, further exacerbating any attachment difficulties the child may have. By acting as a point of contact and advocate, the DT is in a unique position to support the child or young person, their parents and guardians and teachers. This important role has been demonstrated in research

related to how they support LAC. With their likely similar history, it is a positive that this role has now been extended to PLAC. As with all new initiatives, there is likely to be a process of adjustment for many DTs who have not had PLAC as part of their remit.

While some LAs have promoted the inclusion of PLAC within the remit of DTs, it did not become a statutory requirement until September 2018. The profile and thus the needs of PLAC children are likely to be both similar and unique in comparison to LAC; as such, it would follow that the experience of staff working with this group are likely to mirror this position.

The role of the DT extends beyond the school, into multi-agency working with others such as VSH, EPS, Children's Social Care and CAMHS. To gain a better understanding of how these different, yet complementary services work together, it is important to first understand the unique experiences of the individuals within these roles. By developing this understanding, a more cooperative and holistic approach can be taken to supporting both individual children and the systems within which they exist. Supporting DTs to explore their experiences is likely to reveal nuances of the role that are far beyond the scope of a policy document.

Within the previous literature there are no studies that explore the experiences of DTs in relation to previously looked after children. This suggests that this research could add to the currently available literature related to DTs, PLAC and other related areas. It is hoped that by gathering the in-depth and personal views of DTs, that a greater understanding of their experiences, perceptions and support and training needs will be gathered. These findings could then be utilised in multi-agency working between schools, virtual school heads and educational psychology services.

1.11 Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the ways in which children and young people become 'looked after', alongside an explanation of the various types of legal permanence. Further to this the chapter explored the impact of adverse childhood experiences and the impact of these within the classroom setting.

To gain an understanding of the current support available to LAC and PLAC, the various initiatives in place were explored. Following this, the chapter provided context regarding the local context within which the research took place.

Further to this, the role of multi-agency working and the role of the EP were explored. Finally, the researcher positioning, and rationale for the study were provided for context regarding the researcher.

The following chapter will explore the current literature available in relation to PLAC, as well as in relation to DTs, with the aim to support the answering of the research question:

How do designated teachers experience supporting previously looked after children in primary settings?

Chapter 2. Literature review

2.1 Overview of the Chapter

The aims of this chapter are to review literature related to PLAC and experiences of DTs and is comprised of two parts. The first literature search is outlined in relation to PLAC and the findings of the returned results are summarised. Another literature search was undertaken in a more systematic manner after the study had been conducted and so was able to be tailored to consider the findings and points made in the discussion, so as to answer a pertinent question regarding DTs role perception.

2.2 Literature Search One

A variety of search strategies were employed. Initially, the search terms “adopted”, “special guardian”, “child arrangement”, “education”, “school” and “previously looked after” were employed. An initial search of EBSCO host (which includes databases such as PsychINFO, Education Source, PEP archive and SocINDEX) was undertaken. Within this search, psychology databases (such as PsychINFO and PEP archive) were felt to be useful due to their relevance to psychology, while education databases (Education Source and ERIC) supported the focus on education. Due to the ambiguity of the words used to describe PLAC, some of the searches, even with appropriate limiters, returned in excess of 200,000 articles and were therefore deemed to be of little use to this search. Following this initial search, additional searches took place using the reference sections of relevant articles. Websites of organisations with a key association to research in this area, such as Adoption UK; PAC-UK; Grandparents Plus; and Special Guardians and Adopters Together, were explored, as well as relevant government policy papers. Finally, editions of a particularly relevant journal, the Journal of Adoption and Fostering, from 2008 to 2020 were hand-searched.

This search approach revealed further the dearth of research related to PLAC; the vast majority of literature related to children raised outside of their birth families pertains to adopted children, with a negligible amount focusing on children subject to SGO's. Within the literature search, CAO's were noted and discussed in government policy papers. Despite several searches however, no empirical research was found relating to CAO's made in respect of children who had been previously looked after. The literature instead related to CAO's made within the family court, typically as a result of parental custody and access arrangements.

2.3 What does the Literature Say About Previously Looked After Children?

2.3.1 *Early Life Experiences*

Adopted children are some of the most vulnerable in society (Gore Langton & Boy, 2017). Most children who go on to be adopted enter the care system as a result of experiencing abuse or neglect (DfE, 2016) and for many of these children, their experiences of trauma would have started in the womb, through the exposure to alcohol, drugs and domestic abuse (PAC-UK, 2014). McSherry (2020) highlights that children who are unable to be reunited with their birth families are likely to have experienced the most trauma and may have had multiple experiences of loss and change prior to being permanently placed.

2.3.2 *Stability in Placement*

Stability for LAC is an influential factor in relation to the educational outcomes for LAC, as such, the need for stability for PLAC is understandable. The pattern of disruption is somewhat different to adoption disruptions and although overall disruption rates are low, 67% of SGO disruptions occur within two years of the order being made, considerably higher than the 14% of adoption disruptions. Additionally, just over two-thirds of SGO disruptions occur prior to the child turning 11 years old Selwyn, Wijedasa and Meakings (2014). This suggest that children subject to SGOs

are most at risk of placement breakdown during their primary school careers, while those on adoption orders are most at risk of breakdown more than five years later, with this occurring in 57% of the adoption order breakdowns (Nuffield, 2019).

Children who are unable to live with their birth families will have suffered separation and feelings of loss, even when living with their birth family is characterised by neglect or abuse. Schofield and Beek (2005) suggest that these feelings are compounded as a result of multiple placements. This instability likely impacts the child's ability to develop secure attachments (see Appendix 1 for description), which (Munro & Hardy, 2006) suggests makes it harder for children to establish relationships with their new carers, risking placement breakdown.

In their analysis, Harwin et al. (2019) showed that 81% of the children had a pre-existing relationship with the special guardian prior to SGO proceedings, such as through their family network or having been cared for them occasionally. Conversely, 19% of children did not know their future special guardian. In addition, 31% of the children did not move to live with their special guardian until after the end of legal proceedings, suggesting that the strength of the relationship had not been tested prior to the legal order being made.

Research indicates that placement stability impacts on many areas of a child's life (DfE, 2013a). Placement changes may be necessary for a variety of reasons and at times may be requested by the child or young person themselves. Despite the many positive reasons for a change, moving between placements typically has an emotional impact on children. A move may involve saying goodbye to their home, people and even pets. Moving to a new placement may mean getting used to a new house, people and rules (Become, n.d.). Children can find it confusing to understand

why they have been moved, wondering if they did something wrong, or indeed if something is wrong with them. These experiences can compound already difficult feelings about their situation as a looked after child. In addition to the emotional impact of changing placement, there are many practical changes. At times, a placement move will necessitate a move to a different school. These changes can have a negative impact on their education as a result of gaps in their learning, attachment difficulties and difficulties settling into their new school. It is vital therefore, that school staff develop an awareness of the potential impact of such changes in a child's life.

2.3.3 Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a series of preventable birth defects of the brain and body and they only exist because of the prenatal exposure to alcohol (Adoption UK, 2018). While no exact figures of its prevalence exist, the WHO (Popova, 2017) suggest that approximately one in every 100 children is affected by FASD. Children are frequently diagnosed misdiagnosed, however, it is believed to be the most common non-genetic cause of learning disability in children (Stratton, Howe & Battaglia, 1996). FASD may affect anyone whose mother drank alcohol while pregnant, however, some groups such as looked after and adopted children are believed to be at greater risk. This is potentially due to the increased likelihood that alcohol misuse was a factor in the parenting by mothers who have had their children taken into care (Adoption UK, 2018).

The first medical reports on Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) were published in 1968 by Paul Lemoine, a French paediatrician. Since then, the United States and Canada have led on the development of understanding of FAS and the wider umbrella condition of FASD. In the UK, even amongst medical practitioners, knowledge of

FASD is not widespread, leading to misdiagnosis. In 2017 as part of the annual FASD awareness day, the National Organisation for Foetal Alcohol Syndrome UK (NOFAS-UK) conducted a survey of General Practitioners (GPs) (Adoption UK, 2018). They found that only 31% had an in-depth education regarding FASD and less than one-quarter felt 'strongly confident' that all those with FASD were being diagnosed properly. The findings suggested that GPs would benefit from greater education and guidance on FASD and its lifelong impact on brain development.

The Institute of Medicine (1996) indicates that alcohol is believed to cause more harm during pregnancy than cocaine or heroin. In addition, they contend that alcohol has "by far the most serious neurobehavioural effects on the growing foetus" (Institute of Medicine, 1996, p.35).

Adoption UK (2018) highlights that a person with FASD may show a wide range of signs, both invisible characteristics and physical effects. Invisible signs may include attention and memory deficits, difficulty with abstract concepts, hyperactivity, poor impulse control, and difficulty learning from consequences. The physical effects may manifest as specific facial characteristics, vision or hearing problems, heart problems and damage to the structure of the brain.

The invisible and physical characteristics can present themselves as difficult behaviours, particularly in the home and at school. As a result, some parents and carers seek support from an array of professionals without getting a diagnosis, or find that their child is diagnosed with an alternative need such as a conduct disorder (Adoption UK, 2018). School age children are often only diagnosed when undergoing an assessment for an alternative need, such as a learning disability or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). For children who are not diagnosed early, they

run the risk of developing the secondary difficulties of their condition, including mental health difficulties and school withdrawal (Mukherjee, Hollins & Curfs, 2012).

Children with FASD often process information and learn differently to other children (Millar et al., 2014) however, they have significant individual variability between their needs. This may help to explain why common approaches such as medication or cognitive behavioural therapy may not work as successfully with children with FASD (Blackburn, Carpenter & Egerton, 2012) and why such children are more likely to attract the attention of educational psychologists or other clinical professionals (Millar et al., 2014). There is growing evidence that children with FASD are over-represented in children's social care, with some studies estimating that between 17-50% of children in care have FASD (Fuchs, Burnside & Marchenski, 2010).

In 2015 a retrospective audit was undertaken on all children who had been seen in Peterborough's community paediatrics clinics between 2010-2013 (Gregory, Reddy & Young, 2015). The children had all been referred for assessment in relation to their complex behavioural difficulties, or had been referred as part of a statutory health assessment for LAC, with behavioural difficulties noted at the time of the assessment. Seventy-two children were identified as fulfilling the criteria for FAS/FASD and of this 72 were LAC and 14 were adopted. Of the adopted children, six had been given their diagnosis prior to their adoption and the remaining eight were diagnosed after adoption, following the child presenting with difficulties. It was also found that in the latter group, most of the adoptive parents had no knowledge of the possible long-term difficulties of FAS/FASD. Many of the parents were relieved to have an explanation of their child's difficulties, however the diagnosis also led to the realisation of the potential long-term difficulties for their child and the wider family.

To elicit further information about care-experienced children, the researchers undertook a second audit, focusing on 160 LAC health assessments and adoption medical assessments, completed between January and December 2013. Of the 45 adoption reports audited, 75% had a prenatal history of exposure to alcohol and/or drugs. Although the study only relates to a small number of children, notably, all 45 children were aged under five years old, so few would be demonstrating the concerns that may become more apparent later on in their lives. This is significant for children who are permanently placed from a young age, as their guardians or adoptive parents may not be aware of the difficulties the child may face later on, especially once they start school.

2.3.4 Parents and Carers

A wide array of studies have demonstrated the importance of parental involvement as an element of ensuring effective education for all children (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011); DfE, 2011). Concerns about their child's education featured predominantly across several studies of adoptive parents and special guardians, with suggestions that supporting adopted children through education is one of the 'top three' challenging things about parenting an adopted child (Adoption UK, 2018).

In the 2020 adoption barometer report (Adoption UK, 2020), the researchers found that 80% of the respondents felt that their child needed more support in school than their peers, with 85% feeling that their adverse early experiences negatively impacted their child's ability to cope in school.

A third of parents indicated that prior to the adoption, they had not been given any information or had discussion about schools and education and 37% had not been told about the possible difficulties that adoptive children in general might face in school. The researchers did highlight that 74% of the parents reported that they were

told about the educational development and academic ability of their child and 47% were alerted to their existing difficulties at school. Despite this, many wished to know more about their children's education (Cooper & Johnson, 2007).

Harwin et al. (2019) reported that special guardians were surprised at the lack of support with children's social care once the order had been made. Whilst it was understood that the LA was no longer the child's parent, the lack of support, especially in light of the support plan made at the time of the order, several guardians surveyed appeared surprised at the 'sudden' drop in support.

Special guardians expressed the importance of accessing support, however many felt that it was difficult to do within their own families as people 'didn't understand' what they were going through. Instead, many sought out support groups to be able to share concerns with other people who understood their experience, however some were reluctant to attend sessions facilitated by social workers, due to the feeling of not being able to be honest with the social worker in attendance.

2.3.5 Experience of Parenting

Thomas (2013) suggested that adoptive parents require 'radical changes' to their parenting skills in order to provide a therapeutic environment for children who have experienced trauma and loss. Over two-thirds of approved adopters had no children prior to adopting and almost 60% had no personal experience of adoption (Dance, 2015). In respect of special guardians, they had not typically planned to become parents, instead DfE (2014a) found that most had stepped into the role as a response to needs within their family. Wade, Dixon and Richards (2010) and Harwin et al. (2019) alluded to the difficulties special guardians faced, such as managing contact with birth parents, meeting the emotional needs of the child and dealing with

the additional strains in relation to increased financial stress and limited leisure and employment opportunities.

2.3.6 School Systems

Barratt (2011) suggested that although the education system makes special provision for LAC, once they are adopted, they become 'invisible', remarking that the education system 'forgets their past' upon adoption and the limited understanding meant that children were simply expected to quickly fit in. Adoptive parents often face a challenge of selecting the right school for their child and often need to do so quite quickly.

Quinton, Rushton, Dance and Mayes (1998) stated that 90% of the five to nine-year-olds in their study were attending school within a month of their placement, suggesting that education or schooling may become a priority above the child's needs to familiarize him / herself with the new family and environment Barratt (2011, p.142). Adoption UK (2014) surveyed 1500 adopters of 2100 children, finding that 80% of the parents felt that their children needed more support in school than their peers. Further to this, Adoption UK (2020) found that in 2019, 14% fourteen percent of adopted children changed school in order to find one that would better meet their child's needs, highlighting the difficult task they face.

In 2019, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Virtual School (Hampshire County Council, 2019) conducted an online survey in relation to PLAC. They analysed 284 fully completed surveys, the majority of which were from adoptive parents and a small number from special guardians. They found that although 98% of their respondents had informed the school that their child was adopted, 24% were not sure if their child was recorded as adopted on the school census, which would allow the school to claim for PP+ in respect of their child.

2.3.7 Designated Teacher Role

When asked about the role of the DT, just over half of the respondents (56%) in the Hampshire and Isle of Wight study reported that they were aware of the role of the DT in their child's school. A lower number (40%) reported that they had met with the DT, however 60% of all those who met with the DT indicated that their child had SEN, suggesting that parents of children with SEN, who would likely explore further needs with the schools, were more likely to meet with the DT. Approximately 45% of the respondents reporting having had discussions with their school with regards to how the PP+ was being used, however of those who had not met with their DT, only 26% has had any discussion or knowledge of how the PP+ was being used, highlighting the importance of engagement between the school and the family.

2.3.8 School Attachment Aware Practice

Research undertaken by Stewart (2017) found that teachers perceived training about supporting adopted children to be limited. It is key that school staff are aware of how children's experiences, particularly vulnerable children how this can affect their behaviour in school (DfE, 2018c). Research highlights that an understanding all these experiences and needs should be "reflected in the design and application of behaviour policies including through individualised graduated response is balanced with the needs of the whole school community and its physical and mental health" (DfE, 2018c, p.19).

For teachers, it is really important to be able to 'read' challenging behaviours and respond appropriately. It is a concern that the majority of teachers will not have covered such issues in their training (NICE, 2015). NICE also called for education professionals to be trained in understanding attachment difficulties; how they can present, how these difficulties can affect learning and behaviour and how they can support children and young people with attachment difficulties.

According to Bergin and Bergin (2009) children's social emotional well-being is critical to school success and attachment is the foundation of social emotional well-being. As a result, they suggest that educators are likely to be more effective if they are able to understand how attachment affects the children in their schools.

Many schools have undertaken Attachment Aware (AA) or Trauma Perceptive Practice (TPP) training within their settings. The premise of the AA training is 'an attachment-informed approach for all professionals working with children, including those within the universal services, offers the best prospect for effective early intervention for children, whatever their age or family situation' (Furnivall, McKenna, McFarlane & Grant, 2012). Several studies have highlighted the significance of using research on attachment to inform targeted interventions and whole school practice, to support children with SEMH difficulties (Parker, Rose, Gilbert, 2016; Furnivall et al., 2012; NICE, 2015).

2.4 Literature Search Two

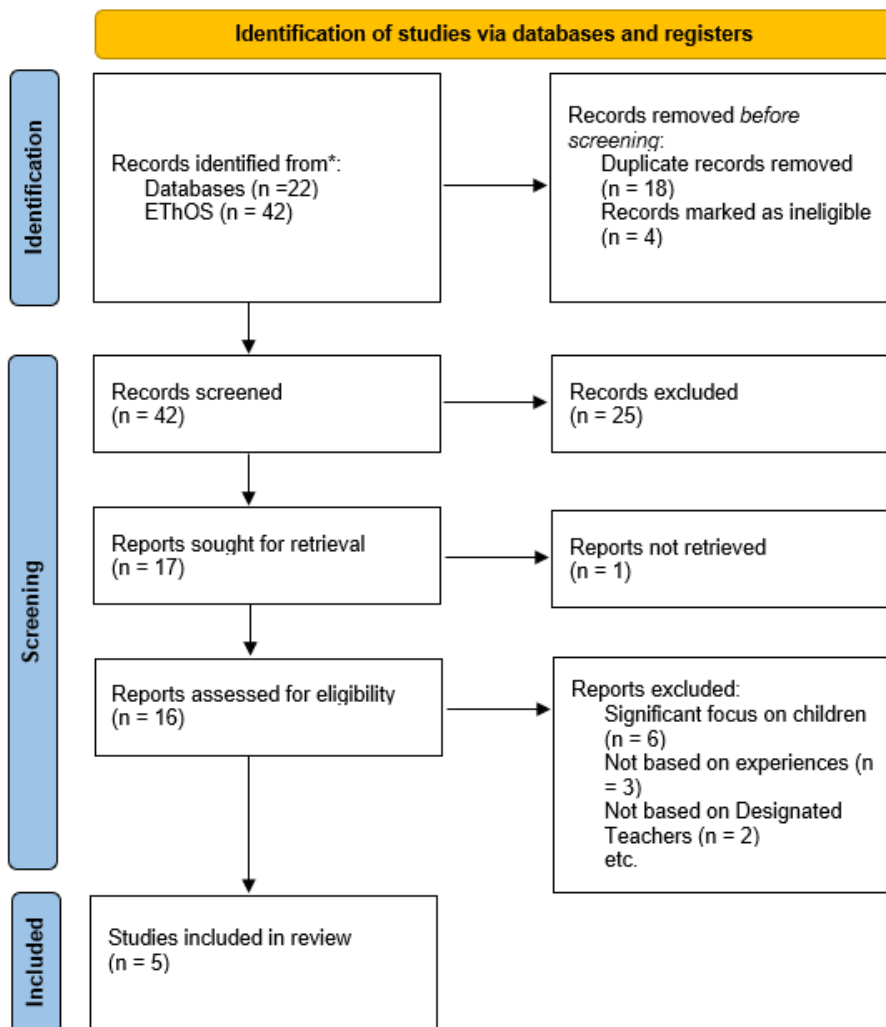
The searches were limited to 2008-2021 to reflect the changes in legislation related to Designated Teachers and the statutory status of their role. The study is based on the education and legislative systems of England and Wales, therefore, studies outside of England and Wales were excluded.

2.4.1 Search Strategy

The full inclusion/exclusion criteria and search strategy can be found in Appendix 2. The searches generated a total of 64 articles and a brief review of the titles led to 22 articles being removed, including 18 duplicates, leaving 42 articles remaining. These articles were then screened further and following this, 16 articles were reviewed to establish whether they met all of the inclusion criteria identified in Appendix 2, of which 5 papers were included in the final review (Simpson, 2012; Goodall, 2014;

Best, 2019; Lewis-Cole, 2019; and Waterman, 2020). Figure 2 depicts a Prisma Flow Diagram of the stages within the process.

Figure 2 Prisma Chart



2.4.2 Discussion of the Literature

Education professionals were the sole focus in three of the studies (Simpson; Waterman; Goodall), however, out of this, only one focused solely on DTs (Goodall). Within their wider studies, two also included the views of parents, while Best also explored the views of children and young people. In respect of the DTs (*or teachers with the responsibility for care-experienced children*), the studies varied in sample size, from four DTs, through to 51. Three of the studies had six or less DTs

(Waterman; Goodall; Lewis-Cole), which would likely limit the generalizability of the findings.

Four of the studies were qualitative, however, Simpson employed a mixed-method approach. The study designs were varied and included semi-structured interviews (Simpson; Waterman; Goodall; Lewis-Cole), questionnaires (Simpson) and the use of a workshop and World Cafe approach (Best). Three of the studies focused on those involved with LAC (Simpson; Waterman; Goodall) and two focused on adopted children (Best; Lewis-Cole). Despite the common experiences of exploring views, perceptions and experiences; there was no common epistemological approach amongst the studies, with a variety of approaches employed: critical realist (Simpson), social constructionist (Best), psychosocial (Waterman), constructionist (Goodall), and interpretivism (Lewis-Cole).

Two of the studies solely used thematic analysis (Best; Waterman), one used thematic analysis and descriptive statistics (Simpson), another used thematic analysis and a card sort approach (Lewis-Cole), and the final study used IPA (Goodall). Two of the studies used earlier phases of the research to determine the content of subsequent phases (Simpson; Best), however, only Best used earlier phases to inform their research specifically with the DTs in their study. All five studies were completed by TEPs during their doctoral training; three of the studies were undertaken after the 2017 legislative changes that widened the DT remit to include adopted children (Best; Waterman, Lewis-Cole), however, Waterman did not explore the links to this population and none of the studies explored PLAC who were not adopted.

Table 5 *Overview of Reviewed Papers*

	Simpson (2012)	Best (2019)	Waterman (2020)	Goodall (2014)	Lewis-Cole (2019)
Title	The virtual school for cared for children: an exploration of its current and future role in raising pupils' academic attainment and achievement and promoting emotional wellbeing	Exploring the Educational Experiences of Children and Young People Adopted from Care: Using the Voices of Children and Parents to Inform Practice	"It depends on the individual": A psycho-social exploration of designated teachers' and virtual school advisory teachers' experiences of supporting looked after children in education.	An Interpretative Phenomenological Study Exploring Designated Teachers' Experiences of Supporting Looked After Children	Adoptive parents' home-school partnerships : an exploration of the partnership experiences of parents and school staff with a focus on barriers, facilitators and developing partnership practices
Research Question(s)	To what extent do DTs for cared for children currently feel confident in their role and supported by the VS for cared for children?	How can the educational experience of adopted children be used to inform practice?	What are virtual school advisory teachers and designated teachers experiences of supporting looked after children academically and emotionally?	How do Designated Teachers make sense of their experience of supporting looked after children?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What do SENCOs view to be the key needs of adoptive parents working with school staff 2) Which of the partnership factors reported by the adoptive parents are unanticipated by SENCOs and why are

					they surprising to SENCOS? 3) How do SENCOS view that partnership experiences and practices with adoptive parents could be improved?
Ontology	Subjectivist	Social Constructionist	Critical Realist	Relativist	Relativist
Epistemology	Critical realist	Social Constructionist	Psychosocial	Constructionist	Interpretivism
Data Collection	Questionnaire	Workshop and world cafe	Semi-structured interviews lasting approx. 90 mins	Semi-structured interviews	Semi-structured interviews
Participants and sampling	Emailed to 149 DTs in LA. 16 Responded via email, more were recruited via network meeting or reminder by VSH. 51 Responses. Primary, Secondary, FE and special	17 DTs Average of 4 years and 6 months in role	Four DTs ranging from 2.5 years – 15 years of experience and DSL/SENCO/Assistant Head. Recommended by VSATs taking part in another stage of the research	Purposeful sampling 6 DTs primary and secondary	3 DTs and 2 LA SENCOS with responsibility for supporting LAC students. Primary, secondary and special
Analysis	Descriptive statistics Thematic analysis	Thematic analysis	Thematic analysis	IPA	Thematic Analysis & Card Sort

2.5 What does the Literature Say About the Visibility of the Designated Teacher Role?

Four of the studies explored the visibility of the DT role, in respect of their workload, levels of responsibility, multi-agency working, working within different systems and processes, and accessing support. Each theme is discussed in turn.

2.5.1 Workload

Three of the studies (Simpson, Goodall and Waterman) explored the challenges of managing their workloads with respect to the changing roles. The participants in Goodall highlighted the demanding nature of supporting LAC, contending that it was “not an easy task” and as LAC numbers grew, so did the DTs difficulties with meeting all of their needs. The role of the DT is often not the only role the DT has within the school; the majority of participants in Simpson suggests that several of those with responsibility for LAC were headteachers, some were SENCOs and a minority what both. The difficulty balancing this work led to feelings of guilt Goodall, and concern about “the frenetic pace” of this balancing act, highlighting their need to be available to help, yet at times struggling to find ways to manage. In addition, participants in Goodall's study expressed their frustration at perceiving themselves to be carrying more of the work of supporting LAC. This was in comparison to their colleagues in other agencies, highlighting the pressure they experienced in feeling accountable for meeting the needs of the children, whilst simultaneously feeling unsupported in doing so. The study by Waterman argued that one of the reasons the DTs experienced difficulty in managing their workloads, was due to the significant amount of time it took for schools to ‘buy in’ to the concept that extra time was required to do their jobs. This resulted in DTs feeling as if they had to continuously justify their role and workload, within their school setting.

2.5.2 Level of Responsibility

Goodall indicated that there was a sense of frustration at feeling that they were holding a greater share of the corporate parenting role than other agencies, indicating that the emotional, as well as the educational needs, become the responsibility of the school. This was similar to concerns raised in Waterman study, suggesting that this was the case despite the wide range of agencies involved. This gives the impression that the DTs felt that much of the responsibilities for children lay with them alone. Despite this, Waterman's study also expressed the perception that the DTs skills were under-utilised, questioning why their knowledge and experience was not employed in more technical areas, such as contributing to court reports.

2.5.3 Multi-Agency Working

Simpson's study outlines the agencies DTs typically work with including health, EPS and CAMHS. Lewis-Cole outlines the need to be proactive in maintaining the involvement of other services, maintaining however, that they needed to be "understanding of the pressures on other services" that may well serve to limit their involvement. The DTs in Waterman and Gs study illustrate the challenges they faced in respect of other agencies knowledge and perceptions of them. Waterman identified that DTs were often not being invited to meetings about their children, as agencies were "not aware that they should have been". Additionally, the study proposes that this may have been as a result of agencies such as children's social care not taking the schools experience and knowledge seriously and therefore overlooking the vital role that they could play in multi-agency working.

Goodall's study suggests that they experienced difficulties related to the sharing of information. They outlined how difficult it was for them to keep up to date with changes in the child's life, as they spent significant amounts of time chasing other people for information, which limited their ability to effectively support the children in

their care. Furthermore, the study suggested that one of the main challenges the DTs faced when working with others, both within and external to the school, was frustration at the lack of knowledge and understanding of their role. Goodall suggested that this led to feelings of isolation at “not being able to identify” with others, as no-one else could relate to their experiences.

2.5.4 Systems and Processes

Waterman explored the challenges they faced in respect of the inconsistencies they experienced when working with VSH's from different LAs. There was a sense of frustration that the level of funding and involvement from the VSH varied widely, which resulted in DTs having to navigate markedly different systems, while supporting different children in their school. In relation to their own school systems, Goodall's study highlighted the barriers DTs faced in respect of their positions within their schools. This included their perception that they lacked the necessary seniority to make decisions about implementing essential support, especially when it came with a financial implication for the school. Simpson explored similar challenges in respect of trying to access funding in a timely fashion, highlighting the hurdles the DTs had to overcome within their school systems. These challenges were not dissimilar to those found in Goodall's study, with participants lamenting the repetitive nature of the paperwork and ineffective systems imposed on them, ultimately suggesting that the systems in place were not helping practise.

2.5.5 Accessing Support

Four of the studies (Simpson, Waterman, Goodall & Lewis-Cole) explored DTs experiences of needing and accessing support, both from within their schools and from external agencies such as the VS. Simpson study indicated that most DTs were aware of the role of the VSH due to having contact as a result of them completing PEP's, attending meetings and providing advice or training to DTs. In addition, they

found that the DTs had a high level of awareness of the support available to LAC, noting their appreciation of the early access to practical and emotional support from the VS. The DTs emphasized the importance of this support and were keen for it to continue when children were adopted, stressing their concerns that support reduced for both themselves and the children post-adoption. Simpson explained that even when support is not required, it is “helpful to have a named contact” should it be needed . This experience of support however was not experienced by all of the DTs. Waterman commented that while the VSH did provide some guidance and were able to attend meetings and access funding; they perceived the support to be of limited practical value with it being mostly theoretical in nature.

Waterman’s study explored the emotional impact on the role on DTs, stating that the level of emotional support available to DTs was insufficient to “manage the emotional transference” the DTs experienced from the children. In addition, the participants suggested that the emotional challenges of supporting LAC meant that they had to “put on a work hat” and suppress their emotions in order to advocate on behalf of and provide support for LAC. The DTs reported that alongside the emotional challenges they experienced supporting LAC, they found it difficult acting as an emotional support for the wider staff body within the school, emphasising the need for need for supervision for the DTs.

2.6 What does the Literature Say About Designated Teachers Understanding of the Needs of Children?

The role DTs play in understanding and supporting the needs of children and young people was explored in all of the studies. The findings covered four different themes: identity, financial implications, educational and emotional.

2.6.1 Financial Implications

Three of the studies explored how the DTs utilised PP+. Lewis-Cole emphasised the need to “find creative ways to spend the funding”, with consideration given to how it could be used to strengthen partnerships with children and their families and not solely spent on interventions. Similarly, Simpson study identified that the PP+ funding had been utilised to facilitate change for students, as well as to help staff to increase their understanding of the impact of the early life experiences on cared-for children. Difficulties accessing the required funding was explored in Waterman study, the author stressed the difficulties DTs faced as a result of the impact of austerity on school budgets. The study outlined the challenges the DTs faced in managing financial restrictions placed on the school, whilst trying to ensure that the PP+ was not subsequently absorbed into the wider school budget and therefore unavailable for the pupils they support.

2.6.2 Identity

Three of the studies (Best, Goodall and Waterman) explored the role DTs play in the development and understanding of individual pupil identities. In Best study, the participants suggested that it was part of their responsibility to help children to develop a positive sense of identity as a LAC, however, they also highlighted the fears experienced by the DT with regards to holding this responsibility.

The role the DT played in the children’s identity development was impacted by whether or not their identity as a LAC had been disclosed. In Goodall ‘s study the DTs discussed the dilemmas they faced with regards to how to provide relevant support to a child as a looked after child, when their status was not widely known in school. Similarly, participants in Waterman’s study highlighted the desire of secondary age LAC students to be “provided with a safe space to talk”, but not be required to disclose their status. Goodall found that the DTs believed their schools to

be inclusive and therefore they were able to provide this support without there needing to be an overt focus on the LAC across the school.

2.6.3 Behaviour

The results from Best study highlighted the DTs need to support staff to be empathetic in their approach to understanding their care-experienced children and the impact of their lived experiences. In addition, the researcher highlighted the role of DTs in encouraging staff to adopt different styles of engagement and strategies when managing children's heightened emotions. Furthermore, Waterman study explored similar challenges, suggesting that some staff focused on within child explanations, giving little credence to the impact of the environment or school ethos. It is unlikely that these views pertained solely to LAC, however, is evident that this was an area of focus for the DTs, in respect of their current remit.

DTs play an important role in supporting children's identities and manage, at times, complex feelings. Be identified the need for DTs to identify strategies to help the children with their difficult feelings, while Waterman highlighted the importance of providing psychoeducation to the children. For secondary school pupils, this was deemed vital to support them in developing and understanding of concepts such as trauma, its impact on brain development and links to the children's presenting behaviour.

Developing secure relationships was discussed with great importance by Best and Waterman, with both highlights in the need for children's voices to be heard and the DTs and offer school staff acting as trusted adults. Waterman suggested that their focus is typically on academic attainment, however they recognise that the children also need emotional support, suggesting that the school has a role in supporting pupils with their emotional instability. The DTs within the study however, were not

consistent in their beliefs, with some DTs expressing conflicting views on the appropriateness of the school environment as the best place to receive emotional support. This illustrates the difficulty's DTs and wider the school staff experienced in their understanding and management of children's emotions.

2.7 What does the Literature Say About Designated Teachers Developing Support for Children?

The DTs experiences of supporting their own and wider staff development was explored in this theme.

2.7.1 Ongoing Professional Development

Two of the studies (Best and Goodall) highlighted the importance of DTs continuing their learning and development, to enable them to have as much of a positive impact on the children as possible. In Goodall, the DTs suggested that it was not easy to begin the role and although they enjoyed experiencing new things and the novelty of the role; they maintained that it was not easily adopted, highlighting that it took time and experience to undertake the role. Lewis-Cole suggested that DTs needed to maintain their knowledge in order to sign-post to the correct services, including being knowledgeable of what is happening around them locally.

2.7.2 Understanding the Impact of Trauma and Attachment Difficulties

Two of the studies examined the role of trauma and attachment-informed staff training. Best explored the need for staff to receive training on the topics of attachment, shame, rejection and anxiety. The researcher suggested that such training would help staff to understand the impact of trauma and how this could be used to develop appropriate strategies to support care-experienced children within their school. Waterman also explored the wider impact of such training, suggesting that it helped in developing the school identity, as one which understood the significance of trauma.

2.7.3 Providing Practical Support

The DTs in Waterman study explained the importance of identifying the adopted children within their school, suggesting that the information helps other staff to be aware of the children's support needs, as well as compiling resources such as one-page profiles. The study also highlighted the role DTs played in supporting staff to have difficult conversations with parents and carers, using the knowledge and experience of the DTs to do so sensitively. Lewis-Cole indicated that DTs developed specific support strategies such as developing groups for parents.

2.7.4 Changing the Ethos of the School

In the study undertaken by Simpson, it was suggested that most of the DTs felt confident in supporting the academic achievement of pupils, however, they were not as confident in supporting their emotional needs. The DTs in Waterman did not discuss their confidence, however, they focused on their role in developing staff understanding and ability, by attending training and subsequently cascading their learning to the wider staff. The findings in Waterman suggest that DTs viewed such practices favourably, illuminating the positive impact of training on the ethos and practices within the school. It was acknowledged that this was not consistent across the board, with the participants in the study cautioning that the teachers' reaction to training was dependent on the experiences of the pupils and staff views about how they should respond to challenging behaviour. Additionally, some of the DTs questioned the influence of the training, indicating that it was not always sufficient enough to effect change.

The study undertaken by Lewis-Cole explored how improving staff understanding helped to shape specific processes within the school. Expanding on this, the findings from Best specifically highlighted the need for behaviour policies to be informed by an understanding of trauma. This included the proposal that in recognition of the

impact of the children's experiences, schools should create a separate section within their behaviour policies for LAC and adopted children. Furthermore, the researcher suggested that schools make more tangible changes, such as introducing changes to their curriculum, such as ensuring that different types of families are promoted within the school.

2.8 What does the Literature Say about Designated Teachers Working with Parents?
Importance of the roles of DTs in supporting parents and carers was discussed in four of the studies, with areas of support being emotional, practical or related to the sharing of knowledge.

2.8.1 Emotional Support

The studies undertaken by Best, Goodall and Lewis-Cole explored the DTs experiences of building relationships with parents and carers. The strength of these relationships were viewed as the foundation for successful partnership working. Best suggested that DTs should work with parents to ensure their voices are heard, Lewis-Cole emphasised the significance of establishing the preferred communication style of the parents and carers and ensuring that they maintain regular communication. Similarly, Goodall notes the importance of DTs being welcoming, respectful and showing empathy towards the parents and carers. The researcher stressed that using parental knowledge could indeed "lighten the load" experienced by DTs.

The impact of not developing relationships was explored in Goodall's study, highlighting that DTs found that where they had not built relationships with parents and carers, they experienced greater barriers to collaborative working. The researcher did caution however that the relationships could become confused, with

some DTs disclosing that they found themselves treating carers as if they were professionals, instead of engaging with them as they did with other parents.

2.8.2 Practical Support

Two of the studies explored the practical support that DTs provided to parents. Best suggested that due to the links they already hold with supportive agencies, DTs should act as advocates for parents. This including taking the lead in contacting external services such as post-adoption services and other agencies the family may require support from. Similarly, Lewis-Cole expressed the importance of broaden the support network around families, including supporting parents to form relationships with other adopters. Lewis-Cole suggested that the onus should be removed from parents with regards to requesting help in the form of Team Around the Child (TAC) meetings or Individual Education Plans (IEPs), indicating that DTs felt they needed to take a more proactive role in arranging these. Alongside documents like the IEPs, to support the ongoing understanding of the children's needs, Lewis-Cole suggested that DTs should work in collaboration with parents and carers to develop and maintain a formal written document about their child. The DTs recognised the burden placed on parents and carers, often with limited experience of school systems and the need to support them.

2.8.3 Sharing Knowledge

Two of the studies Lewis-Cole and Simpson explored the sharing of knowledge between DTs and parents. Lewis-Cole highlighted that DTs needed to be sensitive to the potentially limited parenting experience of adoptive parents and guardians. The researcher highlighted that as the children were typically adopted at or near to school age, parents often have limited time to prepare for engaging with the education system. They suggested that parents were unclear about what to expect with regards to the curriculum, attainment and how to communicate with the school.

The DTs also noted that parents were unclear about what support they would receive from the school, therefore, it was important that DTs were proactive in providing them with the necessary support. In addition, the researcher highlighted that DTs were aware that parents worried about being scrutinised by the school and were keen to be seen to be coping. Simpson outlined the reluctance some parents experienced in asking for support, now that their children have been adopted, potentially perceiving them to be able to cope now that the child has been permanently placed with them.

2.9 Summary

The findings of from the reviewed literature suggest that there is a lack of knowledge in respect of the education of PLAC, as well as the experiences of DTs. There is some research exploring the role of the DT in supporting LAC (Simpson, 2012; Goodall, 2014 and Waterman, 2020), however, research exploring DTs working with PLAC is limited and what does exist, focuses solely on adopted children (Best, 2019; and Lewis-Cole, 2019). The research reviewed explored the DTs experiences of the visibility of the role, the needs of the children, how to support the children and DTs experiences of working with parents and carers.

The role of the DT was amended in 2017 to include having responsibility for the education of both LAC and PLAC. To better understand how DTs undertake their role, it can be argued that partner agencies, such as the EPS, the VSH, post-adoption services and children's social care need to have a greater understanding of the role and experiences of the DTs. This increased understanding will subsequently assist these agencies in providing the DTs with the necessary support, as well as increase the effectiveness of multi-agency working. By working in such a way, those with a remit to support, promote and develop the education of PLAC will be more

equipped to support this vulnerable group of children and young people to have more successful educational, and ultimately, life outcomes.

Throughout the research I will introduce my reflections on the research process, as recorded in my research diary. Extracts from the diary were used to introduce entries across the sections. These will be positioned in reflection boxes, as detailed below.

Reflection:

It was particularly challenging to find research related to DTs. In addition to this, what was found often focused on DTs exploring aspects of other people's roles, or providing a more generic overview of their work within the wider system supporting LAC. It is clear therefore how limited knowledge is in this area and how beneficial this research may prove. There is some exploration of the needs of adopted children, however, it proved particularly difficult to find any literature that related to children on SGOs or CAOs, highlighting just how overlooked and under-researched the needs of these two groups are.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will initially explore the aims and purpose of the study, following this the chapter will outline the research design, research procedures, method of data collection and method of data analysis. In addition, the chapter will explore issues of validity and ethics as they pertain to this study. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a reflection of my experience of the data collection process.

3.2 Aims and purpose

In the introductory chapter, I explained the importance of the role of the Designated Teacher in supporting children who have been previously looked after. It appears from the published literature that very little is known about how DTs experience their work supporting LAC and indeed, even less in relation to their work with PLAC.

The role of the DT extends beyond the school into multi-agency working with others, such as the VS, EPS, Children's Social Care and CAMHS. To gain a better understanding of how these different, yet complimentary services work together, it is important to first understand the unique experiences of the individuals within these roles in working with PLAC. By developing this understanding, a more cooperative and holistic approach can be taken to supporting both individual children and the systems within which they exist. Supporting DTs to explore their experiences is likely to reveal nuances of the role that are far beyond the scope of a policy document.

The aim of this research therefore, is to explore the experiences of DTs in supporting PLAC in primary schools.

The purpose is to increase the understanding of the experiences of the DTs in relation to work with PLAC, therefore EPs will be better positioned to offer such support in their roles. In my position as a researcher and as a TEP, I remain conscious of the notion that EPs are typically seen as important in developing and

maintaining multi-agency working. With their knowledge of child development and early life experiences, they play a key role in supporting the development and dissemination of knowledge to others, including VSHs and DTs.

3.3 Research design

It is generally considered that there are two approaches or paradigms to knowledge production within psychological research, positivism and interpretivism. The positivist position stems from the work of 19th century French philosopher August Comte (1798 – 1857). Positivists suggest that there is a straightforward relationship between the world and our perception and understanding of it (Willig, 2013). The application of positivist approaches typically involves quantitative scientific approaches such as surveys questionnaires and experiments to gather data.

Positivists view the world as external that there is an objective reality irrespective of the researchers perspective or belief (Carson, Gilmore, Perry and Gronhaug, 2001), indeed, the researcher and participant are independent and do not influence each other (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988).

In contrast, interpretivists approaches rely on naturalistic approaches such as interviews and observations. Reality is seen as subjective and multiple; there is no 'one reality'. Interpretivist researchers avoid the more structural and rigid frameworks found in positivist research, allowing researchers to take on a more personal and flexible research approach (Carson et al., 2001). The researcher and participant are interdependent.

3.3.1 Rationale for Qualitative Study

This research is exploratory in nature and aims to explore a relatively unresearched area, the idiographic perspective of Designated Teachers working with previously looked after children. This type of research enables researchers to gain familiarity

with an existing phenomenon and acquire greater understanding of it within its context.

Historically, mainstream psychology relied on quantitative methods to test theories by deriving hypotheses from them, which could then be checked in practice via an experiment or observation (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Using this approach, researchers seek to establish truth by the falsification of theory, producing objective knowledge that is both impartial and unbiased from the outside, 'without personal involvement or vested interests on the part of the researcher' (Willig, 2013).

Traditional quantitative research would not yield the rich and detailed accounts which allow for researchers to explore the life worlds of the participants. Therefore, to appropriately explore the research question, the methodology would need to be inductive, or 'bottom-up', insofar that generated meanings enable the voice of the participants to be heard, whilst remaining flexible to the defining and redefining of emergent themes (Willig, 2013). Accordingly, the most appropriate research approach would be a qualitative rather than quantitative methodology.

3.3.2 Description and Rationale for IPA

IPA is a qualitative approach to research and is concerned with the detailed examination of the individual lived experience and how individuals make sense of these experiences (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), working from the assumption that the individual is the 'expert about their experiences' (Howell, 2013, p.334). It is acknowledged that it is impossible to directly access the experiences of another; understanding can only be achieved through the researchers' interpretations of these experiences.

IPA has its theoretical roots in health psychology; in the 1990s it was used as a way of understanding the experiences of health issues, such as pain. Since then, its

popularity in other areas of psychology, such as educational, social and clinical psychology, has grown. Research questions in IPA are exploratory, so don't lend themselves to hypothesis formulations; instead it is concerned with understanding personal experiences. Accordingly, research titles in IPA studies tend to reflect relatively open and exploratory research questions.

When designing this study, several contrasting qualitative methods were considered. This included discourse analysis and grounded theory; there is some overlap between the approaches. A brief outline of the individual methodologies and reasons for rejection are discussed below. This information should provide the reader with greater clarity as to the justification for the use of IPA within this study.

Discourse Analysis (DA) refers to the study of the ways in which written or verbal discourse are used and understood as part of social interaction (Howell, 2013). As Frohmann (1994) suggests, 'discourse analysis takes discourse as its object of analysis. Its data is talk; not what the talk refers to, but the talk itself' (p. 120). There are two distinct threads to discourse analysis; discursive psychology and Foucauldian discourse analysis. Discursive psychology is concerned with discourse practices, the 'what' people do with talk and writing and how these 'linguistic resources' are used in social interactions (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In contrast, Foucauldian discourse analysis places greater emphasis on how power and dominant discourses in language are used to shape our knowledge or experiences of something (Parker, 1992).

Discourse analysis is concerned with how reality is manufactured and does not seek to produce knowledge, but instead to understand how the discourse is talked into

being. This methodology also acknowledges the active role of the researcher on the construction of their research, viewing them as the 'author'.

This study aims to understand the personal experiences of the DTs; therefore although it would have provided insight into the ways in which language is used and the dominant discourses surrounding PLAC and their support needs, it would not answer the research question, nor explore the life-worlds of the DTs with sufficient depth.

Grounded theory is often seen as an alternative to the IPA approach (Smith et al., 2009). Grounded theory was initially developed to offer a clear structure to qualitative enquiry (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and provides a highly structured approach to the development of theory. Using this approach, researchers set out to generate theoretical accounts of psychological phenomena. The theories are grounded in actual data, meaning that the development of theory comes after the data has been collected. The theories are developed at a macro-level and thus are more generalisable. This study however, focuses on the individual level experiences and were therefore more suited to the micro-level analysis more congruent with the IPA methodology.

3.3.3 Theoretical Basis for IPA

IPA is informed by phenomenology, the study of human experience; hermeneutics, the study of interpretation; and idiography, the study of individuals in their own right; the study of unique cases, things or events (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2003). These areas are not unique to IPA; however, the way in which they are combined provides a specific approach within the field of phenomenology, allowing for a surface, conscious level understanding of how an individual experiences a phenomenon, as well allowing for a deeper exploration of their thoughts and feelings.

By analysing several cases, whilst remaining mindful of the individual experience, understanding of the individual experience will grow and support the development of further interpretations using relevant theory.

IPA differs from other traditional phenomenology, in that the researcher is not the person whose experiences are being studied. Phenomenology is sometimes mislabelled as a purely descriptive. Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006) however, counter that it is instead an 'insiders perspective' and that studies using this method which focus more on description than interpretation or conceptualisation, are in fact poor examples of an IPA.

3.3.4 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is rooted in philosophy and is the systematic study of conscious experience (Howitt, 2013). It is derived from the work of key individuals including Edmund Husserl [1859-1938], Martin Heidegger [1889-1976], Maurice Merleau-Ponty [1908-1961], and Jean-Paul Sartre [1905-1980] (Smith et al., 2009).

Phenomenologists seek to uncover meaning, thus through focusing on an individual's thoughts, feelings and memories, they hope to access their inner life worlds (Noon, 2018). Although the above contributors vary slightly in their ideas, they share a commonality of being interested in the experience of being human, especially with regards to things that matter to us (Smith et al., 2009).

Among the basic concepts of phenomenology, is that there is no clear independence between the human experience and reality (Howitt, 2013), thus phenomenologists contend that reality is how an individual makes sense of or constructs their world.

For Husserl, a key element of consciousness is that of 'intentionality'. This refers to the concept that the object of which we are conscious of is stimulated by the perception of a 'real' object, or through memory or imagination (Smith et al., 2009).

Therefore, there is an 'intentional relationship' between an object and our awareness of it. Phenomenological psychology is not concerned with trying to understand what is happening in people's heads, thus the intentional aspect relates to our experience of things as they appear in our consciousness (Langdrige, 2007).

From the perspective of Husserl, phenomenology involves stepping out of our everyday experience, or 'natural attitude' and instead adopting a 'phenomenological attitude' in which we take a reflexive approach and turn our gaze inwards, towards our perception of the world (Smith et al., 2009). In order to achieve this phenomenological attitude, Husserl suggests that it is first necessary to "consider the consequences of our taken-for-granted ways of living in the familiar, everyday world of objects" (Smith et al., 2009, p.13) achieved by putting to one side, or 'bracketing off' the familiar (also referred to as 'epoche' or phenomenological reduction) (Giorgi, 1997). In relation to IPA, the work of Husserl provides a key focus on reflection and the systematic examination of our conscious, or lived experience, through the process of bracketing. In relation to this research, epoche was demonstrated by periodically analysing my relationship to the data and routinely 'stepping aside' from the data to ensure that the analysis is rooted in the participants and not solely in my own reflections.

Heidegger (1962/1927) began as a student of Husserl, however his work is also seen as marking the move away from Husserl's 'transcendental project' and the 'start of the hermeneutic and existential emphases in phenomenological philosophy' (Smith et al., 2009). Where Husserl was primarily concerned with individual psychological processes, Heidegger was focused on the nature of existence itself, his concept of 'Dasein', the unique quality of being human and the activities and relationships we engage in. Heidegger's views ultimately centre the 'person-in-

context'. From an IPA perspective our 'being-in-the-world' (Smith et al., 2009) is always in relations to something, thus interpretation of one's 'meaning-making activities' is key to phenomenological inquiry. Langdridge (2007) contends that it is not possible for people to achieve epoche by completely suspending their prior assumptions, however Smith et al. (2009) insists that this can be achieved through both reflective and reflexive awareness.

Within this study, I do not suggest that it would be possible for me to completely suspend my albeit limited, but prior understanding of the topic; however, I do believe that I will be able to gain as close an understanding as possible of the experiences of the participants, from their perspectives.

3.3.5 Hermeneutics

According to Dallmayr, hermeneutics is the "practice or art of interpretation" (Dallmayr, 2009, p.23). Historically it was concerned with the interpretation of biblical texts, however, it developed as a philosophical approach for the interpretation of a wider range of texts, including historical and literary texts. Texts are studied in their entirety in a backwards and forwards looping fashion. Hermeneutic theorists are interested in understanding interpretations in itself, trying to uncover the intentions of the original author.

IPA recognises the difficulty a researcher would have in gaining access to the 'exact personal world of another' (Noon, 2018), however as Larkin et al. (2006) contend, the objective should therefore be to obtain a description which gets as close to the participants view as possible.

To gain an insider perspective of experience, IPA requires the use of a double hermeneutic; the participant is trying to make sense of their world and the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their world (Noon,

2018). Smith and Eatough (2007) recognise however, that the double hermeneutic process is complicated by the existing conceptions and previous experiences of the researcher. Successful IPA research therefore, should combine both understanding with regards to seeing what it is like for others and 'analysing, illuminating and making sense of something' (Smith et al., 2009).

Within hermeneutic theory, the hermeneutic circle is seen as one of the key elements of hermeneutics. The concept of the hermeneutic circle suggests a dynamic relationship between the part and the whole. Therefore, to understand a given part, you need to explore the whole and to understand the whole, you must explore the parts. While Smith et al. (2009) acknowledge the difficulties with the circularity of this approach, within interpretation it is useful to acknowledge that the process is not necessarily linear and can involve back and forth between different levels.

The hermeneutic circle provides IPA researchers with a useful way of exploring the method of research (Smith et al., 2009). The analytic method within IPA is often depicted as a linear, step-driven process, however, in practice its very nature is iterative and researchers move back and forth through the various stages as their relationship to the data changes.

3.3.6 Ideography

The third main influence on IPA is idiography. Idiography focuses on detail, specificity and the 'particular', in contrast to more traditional nomothetic approaches that focus on making generalizable claims. IPA is idiographic due to its focus on how individuals in that particular context makes sense with a specific phenomenon (Noon, 2018), indeed Willig (2013) contends that IPA is 'resolutely idiographic', in the

sense that it begins with the particular, whilst ensuring that any subsequent generalisations are grounded in this.

In nomothetic research, the data is collected, transformed and analysed in such a way that the voice of the individual is lost; this type of research leads to the production of data which is concerned with numbers and probabilities, producing 'group averages rather than particular cases' (Smith et al., 2009).

While Smith et al. (2009) content that the ideographic approach can be achieved through the focus on a single case study, most IPA researchers explore a small number of cases in-depth, focusing on examining each individual case in detail, prior to exploring the convergent and divergent across the participants (Smith, 2011).

IPA (and qualitative research in general) focuses on the possible transferability of findings from one group to another, instead of generalisation (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011). Smith et al. (2009) also argues for the notion of 'theoretical transferability' where the reader is encouraged to assess the evidence in relation to their existing professional and experiential knowledge

Within this study, the sample size and homogeneous characteristics of the participants support IPAs idiographic approach of focusing on the individual, while still exploring emerging patterns across a specific context. Thus, the themes identified in this study are not representative of a population any wider than the population being studied.

3.3.7 Critique of IPA

Unlike some other forms of research, IPA is language heavy. Language is the medium by which participants capture their experiences, however participants may not be aware of the richness of detail required not only for IPA, but qualitative

research in general (Noon, 2018). In the current study it was not anticipated that any of the participants would have significant language difficulties, due in part to the requirement for proficiency in the English language as an expectation of their role. To support participants to sufficiently access the inner life worlds, without leading their answers, prompts were utilised throughout the interviews.

Giorgi (2010) suggests that IPA is unscientific and lacks rigour, arguing that the lack of rules about what is commented on, almost leads to what he terms a 'free textual analysis'. Further to this he deems Smith and colleagues' (2009) indication of the method not being a 'prescriptive method', as an oxymoron, highlighting that scientific methods are "meant to be intersubjective" (Giorgi, 2010). Smith (2010) however, argues that there needs to be a balance between "stricture and flexibility", reasoning that although IPA is not prescriptive, there are clear quality control criteria to guide the researcher, as well as help the reader to make sense of it.

A further limitation of the IPA approach is the 'uncomfortable dualism' (Noon, 2018) faced by researchers. The ideographic approach requires a focus on the individual, however the search for connections across cases could potentially lead to individual differences being obscured. With small sample sizes, such as this study, the tension ultimately remains between committing to the ideographic principle and illuminating common themes amongst the participants. To manage this however in line with Noon's (2018) suggestion, I ensured that I gave space for the individual idiosyncrasies of the participants to be heard within the analysis as the themes were developing.

3.4 Research procedures

3.4.1 *Participants*

Prior to undertaking this research, consideration was given to comparing designated teachers experiences of supporting looked after children and previously looked after children, however, I felt that the limited experience designated teachers were likely to have with previously looked after children, may lead to one type of experience dominating the study and providing little scope for comparison.

Further to this, thought was also given to including both primary and secondary designated teachers in the study, however, I felt that due to the differing ages of the student populations, the stages of development and different types of needs, thus having different roles for the primary and secondary designated teachers; that such an inclusion would negatively impact homogeneity of the sample. The decision to focus on the primary phase of designated teachers was due to, as discussed in the introduction chapter, the understanding that both locally and nationally, most previously looked after children achieve permanence prior to or during their primary phase of education. Thus, primary designated teachers are more likely to be supporting children and families who have recently experienced the transition from looked after too previously looked after. This is not to ignore the role and experiences of secondary designated teachers, highlighting that although it falls outside of the scope of this research, there is a need in the future to explore and give meaning to their experiences.

3.4.2 *Sampling / homogeneity*

The approach to sampling was purposive, insofar that participants were selected on the basis that they could offer insights into the experiences of supporting previously looks after children and that they represent a particular perspective on this phenomenon, as opposed to representing an entire population. This research will

therefore aim to examine the experiences of DTs in supporting previously looked after children within the local authority in which I am based.

IPA research is typically aimed to recruit a fairly homogenous sample with the aim to study those for whom this specific research question would be meaningful. In my research the participants will all be currently employed as designated teachers with recent experience of working with previously looked after children, thus, the analysis will endeavour to provide a detailed examination of the experiences of this particular group within a particular context.

3.4.3 Inclusion/ exclusion

Participants were DTs within one district in a large County. Within the specified area there are twenty-eight primary schools. While each school is required to appoint a member of staff with responsibility for the promotion of educational achievement for previously looked after children, it is however, acknowledged that some schools, especially academies and smaller schools, may share this role across schools. This would result in the final number of potential participants being fewer than twenty-eight.

Initially, I contacted the VSH within the County and was provided with a partial list of the primary DTs within the town. Due to the limited information I received, I then asked link EPs to collate the names of the DTs within their allocated primary schools. This information was then used to contact the relevant schools by email (and then by a follow-up telephone call where no response was received) to ascertain the current name and contact details of the DT. Finally, where this information had not been gathered or responded to in the first two steps, EPs were asked to pass on my request for the contact information directly to their SENDCOs. Once this information

had been gathered, an email was sent to all of the potential participants, outlining the research aims and the criteria below. To be eligible for the study, participants must:

- Have the title of Designated Teacher for LAC and PLAC or hold the responsibility in their school for supporting previously PLAC;
- Have a minimum of six months experience in this role; and
- Currently have at least one previously looked-after child on roll at their school.

I was aware prior to starting the research that due to the topic the potential sample population would be quite small. I did not however anticipate the significant difficulties I would experience in recruiting participants. As a result of the initial recruitment attempts, six potential participants were identified. When it became evident that no more participants would be recruited from the initial group, I decided to expand the search to a neighbouring town within the County and in addition, the Virtual School was approached to provide information regarding the study to DTs at a training event; however neither of these steps led to any additional participants being identified.

All potential participants were sent via email, an information sheet outlining the specific criteria and research aims. Some participants were found to not be suitable with regards to the criteria, however of those expressing an interest, ultimately three participants were found to be suitable to engage in the study based in meeting the criteria and were contacted via email to arrange a convenient time for the interviews to be carried out.

3.4.4 Sample Size

There is no definitive guide as to the number of participants required for an IPA study. Qualitative studies are often criticised for (in comparison to quantitative studies) their small sample sizes. Smith et al. (2009) suggests that early qualitative researchers may have felt pressured by possible criticism from their quantitative

colleagues, to adopt large sample sizes. They suggest however, that as research experience has increased, sample sizes have decreased.

The level of detail required in IPA studies lends itself to the ‘quality over quantity’ perspective, allowing for a concentrated focus on a small number of cases, as opposed to a surface level analysis of a large number of cases. IPA studies can theoretically be undertaken on a single case-study basis, however, Smith et al. (2009) suggests that studies of between three and ten participants are appropriate for students, cautioning that the successful analysis of larger datasets require ‘time, reflection and dialogue’; noting that ‘larger datasets tend to inhibit all of these things’ (pg. 52).

3.4.5 Participant Characteristics

Throughout the research process, I was mindful of the need to respect the confidentiality of the participants. This is particularly important with regards to their continued employment within the county in which the research was undertaken. To ensure confidentiality, markers of identification (i.e. name, school name) have been altered. Background information that may have identified individual participants, such as information including the exact number of PLAC on roll and years employed as a DT, were excluded from the thesis. The participant characteristics are outlined in table 6 below.

Table 6 *Participant Characteristics*

	DT One	DT Two	DT Three
Number of PLAC on roll	Seven	Five	Two
Time in role	Three years	Four years	18 months
Additional Responsibilities	SENDCo	SENDCo	Deputy Headteacher

3.4.6 Researcher Positioning

From an ethical and professional perspective, it was important for me to be open and reflexive about my position as a researcher, doctoral student, TEP and member of LA staff. I acknowledge that these roles have differing levels of power and authority, and that these dual roles were likely to impact me as a researcher, as well as the interviewees perception of and engagement with me. Prior to undertaking the interviews, I had met two of the participants in my role as a TEP, however I had only worked directly with one.

There are both advantages and disadvantages to having a shared culture or insider status with the participants. A researcher who has a shared culture with the participants may experience less misinterpretations, however misunderstandings may arise from the assumption of common values beliefs or knowledge (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010). To avoid this, it may be necessary to act as a naïve researcher and ask specific questions about meaning and seek clarifications where needed. Further to this, Coar and Sim (2006) discuss the difficulties with interviewing ones peers, including the possibility that the interviewee could see the interview as a test of their professional knowledge, leading to feelings of vulnerability amongst the participants.

The 'insider' status may enable quicker and greater identification of the participant with the researcher and allow participants to be more open, particularly in relation to sensitive or emotive topics, however as Adler and Adler (1987) insist, insider researchers may find themselves operating within an 'ultimate existential dual role' (pg.73). This role can result in confusion when the researcher responds to the data or participants, otherwise than from the perspective of the researcher (Asselin, 2003).

Prior to starting the doctorate, I gained experience in working with LAC and PLAC in a variety of social care and criminal justice roles, including the experience of advocating on behalf of LAC/PLAC at an LA-wide level. Despite this experience, none of my roles position me as an insider; I did not share the commonality of the participants insofar that I am not a DT, nor had I previously held a teaching position. I was honest with the participants about my experience and positionality. I therefore could not claim to 'understand' the experience of being a DT.

3.5 Data Collection

The most common method of data gathering in IPA, is through in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews. This approach ensures that the researcher is able to gather and analyse detailed descriptions and interpretations of phenomena, using the personal accounts of others (Howitt, 2013). IPA is best suited to data collection methods which 'invite participants to offer rich, detailed, first-person account of their experiences' (Smith et al., 2009).

Smith et al. (2009) acknowledge that the concept of 'rich data' is subjective, however emphasise the importance of participants having the opportunity to speak freely, reflect on their views and develop their ideas. Thus, using a less flexible approach, such as structured interviews or questionnaires are unlikely to provide the participant with the scope to do so, potentially limiting the depth of the information gathered. As a result, semi-structured interviews are favoured because they allow for the development of a rapport, are easily managed and allow participants the necessary space to both think and speak.

3.5.1 *Developing Semi-structured Interviews*

Smith et al. (2009) describe interviews as a 'conversation with a purpose' and although somewhat artificial in nature, the questions in the interview should enable

the participant to tell their story in a way that explores the research topic. Further, Rubin and Rubin (2005) believe that the interviewer and interviewee become 'conversational partners', highlighting the importance of the rapport built between the two. Patton (2014) discusses six different types of questions in interviews:

- Experience and behaviour- i.e. "Could you tell me about your experience of..."
- Opinion and value- i.e. "What do you think about..."
- Feeling- i.e. "How did you feel when..."
- Knowledge- i.e. "What happens when..."
- Sensory- i.e. "When you enter the room, what do you see/smell/hear?"
- Background- i.e. "When did you first start..."

The wording of the questions was carefully considered to ensure that they included a range of descriptive, narrative, evaluative, comparative, circular and probing questions, while avoiding over-empathetic, leading or closed questions (Robson, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). When designing the interview, Smith et al. (2009) suggest that is useful for researchers to start with more descriptive questions before later progressing to more analytical or evaluative concepts, through a process of 'funnelling'.

Smith and Osborn (2008) discuss the importance of designing a schedule in advance of the interview, acknowledging that although the aim of the interview tips to enter the life-world of the participant; the process of developing for schedule 'requires is to think explicitly about what we expect the interview to cover' as well as plan for potential areas of difficulty. The development of an interview schedule enables the researcher to feel prepared and the interview less robotic or scripted, which in turn should support the participant to feel comfortable with the interaction, thus allowing them to provide a detailed account of the experience under investigation (Smith et al., 2009). The interviewee is the 'expert' with regards to the

topic at hand and therefore needs to be given sufficient scope through the questioning to explore this.

3.5.2 Piloting

I conducted a pilot interview with a DT who had experience in working with LAC but not PLAC and therefore did not belong to the interview cohort. The interview was not coded or used in the data analysis. I listened to the recording of the interview several times and made notes based on the interview and the discussion with the interviewee regarding the process. Piloting the interview also provided an opportunity to check the length of the interview and uncover any difficulties with any part of the interview process. Following this process, the appropriate changes were fed into the final interview schedule (Appendix 3).

3.5.3 Conducting the Interviews

Participants were initially contacted via email, in which I introduced myself and provided background information regarding the research study (Appendix 4). Once initial agreement was obtained, further communication via email was used to arrange a date and time for the interview, at the participants convenience. On the day of the interview, participants were provided with a hard copy of the information sheet, given the opportunity to ask any further questions and were then asked to read and sign the consent form if they were happy to proceed (Appendix 5). The interview process was explained to the participant, including that it would be much akin to a conversation.

The interviews were all scheduled to take place on site at the DTs school during the school day. The interviews did not have a definitive length; participants were told that they should last no more than one hour and ultimately lasted between 25-45 minutes. They all took place in rooms where we would not be interrupted, typically

the school library or DT's office, however, during all interviews there was distinct background noise.

The flexibility afforded by the schedule allowed me to adjust the questions in light of the responses by the participants. This meant that I was able to pursue specific ideas that arose in greater depth, supporting my ability to generate a more in-depth understanding of their experiences. Howitt (2013) notes that the end of qualitative interview "is not signalled simply by the final topic on the interview guide being reached" (p. 79). Once all of the questions on the schedule had been asked, I paused briefly to review the interview schedule to ensure that all questions had been adequately covered. Further to this, I provided the interviewee with the opportunity to discuss anything they deemed to be relevant, but had not yet emerged thus far in the interview and included this within the interview recording.

All of the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed to aid with the subsequent analysis. IPA aims to primarily interpret the meaning of the content of the participants account (Smith et al., 2009). O'Connell and Kowal (1995) suggest that it is pointless to transcribe information which will not be analysed; IPA does not require the prosodic aspects to be recorded, thus the exact length of pauses and non-verbal utterances were excluded from the transcription.

3.5.4 Reflecting on the Interviews

Following each interview, I made notes to record my initial thoughts and feelings in relation to that interview, including the process and interaction between myself and the participant. These were then used in the subsequent data analysis process.

3.6 Data analysis

Smith et al. (2009) provides a step-by-step outline of the stages involved in IPA data analysis. These steps were used flexibly as a guide, rather than a structure that

needed to be followed rigidly. Coyle (2007) cautioned that step-by-step methodologies should be used by way of a 'road map', while Smith and Osborne (2003) suggest that while IPA provides a useful outline of a methodological process, it should be an adaptable, analytic process.

As a researcher who had used qualitative methods but not previously the IPA methodology, I was conscious of the need to provide an authentic example of IPA within a Doctoral thesis. Therefore, the approach employed the ideas of Smith et al. (2009), whilst being mindful of the need to maintain an appropriate degree of flexibility.

3.6.1 Reading and Re-reading

The accuracy of the transcript was checked against the audio-recording and amendments made as appropriate. Smith et al. (2009) suggest that listening to the audio-recording helps to ensure that the 'participant becomes the focus of the analysis' (p. 82). Transcribed data was transferred to a word document, where three different columns and line numbers were added. The transcript was in the middle column and space was made for emergent themes to the left and exploratory comments to the right.

3.6.2 Initial Noting

At this stage, the right-hand column is used to make exploratory comments, anything that is interesting or significant. To avoid a superficial summary, attention was paid to the detail within the transcript, within three areas of focus (Smith et al., 2009):

- Descriptive- What the participant has said.
- Linguistic- The specific use of language.
- Conceptual- Analysis at a more interrogative and conceptual level.

The comments were colour-coded to distinguish between the three areas. Figure 3 depicts an extract from the transcript of DT One's interview

Figure 3 Extract from DT One's Interview

67	Okay so the young, the mother of the child in reception has been very productive, so she arranged a meeting with me, in the last
68	summer. <u>And</u> , we talked about what she was entitled to. And she
69	was very knowledgeable <u>anyway, actually</u> . But obviously because
70	they're entitled to erm a school uniform from us. And so, I made
71	her aware of that. And obviously clubs. So, not, not, I don't know,
72	so we were talking to the head teacher about this other day and
73	erm obviously some of these families are probably quite affluent,
74	erm so if they don't need to have any sort of financial support it
75	would be sort of nicer if they, they didn't take us up on it, but
76	certainly they do get that free school uniform. So, but <u>yeah</u> she
77	was very proactive in approaching me and having a meeting with
78	me.
79	
80	Okay. And what about parents who you are made aware,
81	somehow as you said "by osmosis" that a child is adopted. How
82	is that support then put forward.
83	I've kind of erm informally approached them, because, you
84	know, you need to be sensitive to erm, to what they've what
85	gone through and, you know, what they've done for the child. <u>So</u>
86	I've said, you know, if you'd like to meet with me and talk about
87	what we can offer your child. And we've gone through it that
88	way. <u>So</u> it's kind of like an informal, but now that they've got the
89	erm... <u>So</u> what they do now actually, now that they've got their
90	group, kind of the chairperson will often email me asking me, you
91	know, certain questions about the funding and what they're
92	entitled to and that sort of thing.
93	Okay, so then that information is disseminated
94	Yes.
95	<u>So</u> have any of the concerns parents have presented with, have
96	they been different to LAC or any unexpected ones?
97	Not that they were unexpected I don't think, but I know that on
98	the whole, if there have been issues, they erm tend to go back to
99	the, forgot what <u>its</u> called... the post adoption team that's it.

3.6.3 Developing Emergent Themes

The transcript was read again, this time with greater attention paid to the exploratory comments, focusing on discrete chunks of the transcript to develop an understanding of what the participant was saying. Emergent themes were developed to reduce the volume of information whilst still maintaining the complexity of the relationship between the initial notings. Smith et al. (2009) highlights the difference between the second and third stages of analysis, stating that 'whilst initial notes feel very loose, open and contingent; emergent themes should feel like they have captured and reflect an understanding' (pg.92). This stage also requires a move towards 'higher level abstraction', with greater use of psychological terminology. The left-hand column was used to note the emergent themes. By analysing the exploratory comments in each transcript, I was able to identify emergent themes for each

participant. The emergent themes for each participant were recorded separately (Appendix 6) and then grouped together to form initial subordinate themes across all three participants.

See Appendices 7 and 8 for examples of exploratory commenting and emergent themes for DT one.

3.6.4 From Emergent to Subordinate and Superordinate

During this stage, a set of emergent themes were listed. Until this stage, the themes had been ordered chronologically in the order in which they appeared, however, this stage involved charting how the themes fit together. Throughout this process, extracts from the transcripts which corresponded to each emergent theme, were checked to ensure the internal consistency of the themes.

To search for connections across the emergent themes and create subordinate themes, a number of different methods were employed, as per Smith et al. (2009) guidelines, including:

- Numeration- This involves recording the number of times a theme occurred in the transcript. It is not the only measure of importance, however Smith et al. (2009) suggest that it gives an indication of the relative importance to the participant.
- Abstraction- This involves 'putting like with like' and then creating a new name for the new cluster of themes (Smith et al., 2009)
- Subsumption- This is similar to abstraction and is the process by which the emergent theme acquires subordinate or superordinate status (Smith et al., 2009).
- Polarisation- This involves the adoption of an alternative focus, searching for the oppositional relationships between emergent themes by focusing on the differences instead of the similarities.

Following these steps, a list of subordinate themes and the corresponding emergent themes were created. The process was repeated for each participant. By examining what the subordinate themes had in common, I was able to create a list of superordinate themes for each participant. After analysing the initial superordinate themes, the convergence and divergence between each theme was explored. This helped me to refine each theme to ensure that it remained conceptually linked, yet distinct from each other. As a result of this refinement, some of the initial superordinate themes were refined. The initial six superordinate themes were refined to four. This process is detailed in Appendix 9

3.6.5 Clustering Recurrent Themes

This stage involves looking for patterns across participants, including the connections across themes and can 'lead to a reconfiguring and relabelling of themes' (Smith et al., 2009).

A list of all superordinate themes from all three participants was created, transferred to a new word document and subsequently and colour coded to demonstrate commonalities and divergence between the themes.

3.7 Issues of Validity

Qualitative researchers can be criticised by quantitative researchers for a number of reasons- a failure to have representative samples, failure to develop reliable measures or to yield objective findings, or produce replicable outcomes (Yardley, 2000). These 'traditional' measures of research quality are often inappropriate for qualitative research, proving too rigid and thus not providing the flexibility required by qualitative studies. To address this concern, Yardley suggests four characteristics by which qualitative studies should instead be measured: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; and impact and importance.

Each of these is explored below, in the context of this study, in addition to the concept of reflexive validity.

3.7.1 Sensitivity to Context

Sensitivity to context refers to ensuring that the analysis and interpretation remain sensitive to the data, the overall social context and the relationship between the researcher and the participant. In the current study, I ensured that I was clear with the participants about my role and motivations for undertaking the study, as well as allowed for space beforehand to discuss any concerns they may have had. This ensured that I was able to be mindful of any concerns throughout the course of the interview. As previously discussed, I developed a rapport with the participants to facilitate their comfort and security, thus affording them the opportunity to have a full and rich exploration of their views.

During the interviews it was important to be aware of and sensitive to, the shifting context within the interviews, such as when participants touched on difficult or emotive topics. Further to this, I was mindful of both my experience and the relevant literature within the fields of education, looked after and previously looked after children and how these may influence the interpretation of the data; ensuring that the analysis is both faithful and close to the gathered data.

3.7.2 Commitment and Rigour

Within qualitative research, commitment refers to the researchers' prolonged engagement with the topic, the development of skill in the methods being used and becoming immersed in the data. In the current study, commitment was demonstrated through the process of the repeated re-reading of the transcripts and the exploration and refinement of the themes.

Rigour refers to the completeness of the data and is informed, not necessarily by the size of the sample, but by the ability of the sample to provide all of the information required for a thorough analysis. Rigour also refers to the completeness of the interpretation by the researcher. Within this study rigour was demonstrated by the persistent approach to recruitment, the reflexive process both during and following the interviews, and ensuring that I remained clear about the stages of the research process and how to approach the analysis.

3.7.3 Transparency and Coherence

Transparency in IPA refers to the clarity of the research process and how this is communicated and detailed throughout the study. In this study, transparency was demonstrated by clearly detailing things such as how participants were selected, how the interview schedule was developed, the steps by which the analysis was undertaken and how these are demonstrated in the extracts.

Coherence in qualitative research examines whether or not the research presents a coherent argument (Smith et al., 2009). This is demonstrated by how apparent it is that the themes fit with the contextual evidence and how ambiguities and contradictions are dealt with within the analysis. Within this study, coherence was demonstrated through the defining and redefining of themes and the drafting and re-drafting of the analysis, in line with the principles of IPA research.

3.7.4 Impact and Importance

Yardley (2000) argues that the most decisive criterion by which researchers should be judged, is the impact and utility of the research; suggesting that the test of validity 'lies in whether or not it tells the reader something interesting important or useful' (Smith et al., 2009, p.183).

This study explores voices that have been seldom heard and gives light to these voices in relation to a novel topic. Following the interviews, I explored the participants feelings related to taking part in the research process and the potential impact on the role of the DT and those that support them, in reference to the information and experiences they had detailed.

3.7.5 Reflective Validity

Reflexive validity refers to the researchers openness to change and develop as a result of the data. Stiles, Honos-Webb and Lani (1999) suggests that new ideas emerge in response to being confronted by new information. This process means therefore, that researchers' need to be cautious when interpreting data, to ensure that the process remains iterative and within the structure of an IPA. In this study, I ensured that I kept a diary of my experiences throughout, highlighting my thoughts, feelings and reflections and how these may be influential throughout the study.

3.8 Ethics

This research adhered to the ethical guidelines set by the BPS (BPS, 2018) and the Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2014). Ethical permission to undertake the study was granted by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust Research Ethics Committee (Appendix 10). Table 7 below summaries the key ethical considerations and challenges within this study, as well as the steps that were taken to address each issue.

Table 7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical consideration	Steps taken to address this
Consent	Voluntary, informed, written consent was obtained from participants. Prior to starting the interview, participants were provided with an information sheet, which outlined the aims and objectives of the study (Appendix 4). Participants were then asked to give their written consent (Appendix 5). Participants were made aware of what would happen to their interview data, who had access to the data and how the findings would be shared. All participants were over the age of 18 and interviews were undertaken in English, the native language of the researcher and the participants.
Confidentiality	To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in the transcription of interviews and the code linking the original data with the pseudonyms was stored separately. Pseudonyms were also used in the reporting of the data. Participants were informed of the limits of confidentiality in relation to the small sample size and the steps taken to adjust identifiable data to protect their identity wherever possible.
Feedback for participants	As per the BPS (2018) guidance, at the end of the interview process participants were provided with an opportunity to reflect on the interview, immediately after the process. Some of this was audio recorded and the conversation continued off-tape. All participants were provided with a debriefing sheet (Appendix 11), providing further details regarding the study, contact details for the researcher and supervisor and information relating to obtaining further support after the interview process. All participants were offered further debriefing for any issues raised during the interview, however none of the participants requested this.
Right to withdraw	Prior to giving consent, participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study, prior to the data being analysed. Further to this, the information regarding their right to withdraw was also on the debriefing form, alongside the contact details needed if they chose to withdraw their data. No participants chose to withdraw from the study.
Data retention and management	The management and retention of data complied with the University of Essex's Code of Practice for Research and the Data Protection Act 1998. Interview audio-recordings, transcripts and participant details were stored in password-protected files and identifying information was stored separately from the pseudonyms given to the participants. Recordings and transcripts will be stored for 10 years after the first date of publication of the thesis, after which they will be destroyed.

3.9 Reflection Box

This chapter outlined the research aim and purpose, as well as detail the steps undertaken to collect the data. An overview of the data analysis process was provided to highlight the steps and analytic process used while completing IPA research. Finally, issues of validity and ethical considerations were explored. The following chapter will provide a more detailed overview of the data analysis as outlined in this chapter.

Reflection:

At the time of my initial participant recruitment, a county-wide restructure of SEN provision had recently commenced. This likely impacted the availability of potential participants, as the vast majority of the DTs I managed to obtain the correct information for, were part of their school SLTs and held multiple roles and responsibilities which were needed during the restructuring process. Further to this, I found that when I telephoned school offices, several administrators were unaware of the role or the name of the DT, with some asking if I wanted to speak to the Designated Safeguarding Lead or assuming it would be the responsibility of the SENDCo. Additionally, after viewing school staffing structures on their respective websites, I noticed that the majority listed the names, photographs and job titles for their staff, including where they held multiple roles and responsibilities. Positively this included support staff such as Learning Support Assistants (LSAs), lunchtime supervisors and ground staff; noticeably conspicuous in its absence however, was the DT role, being the only statutory role absent from each of the twenty-eight websites viewed.

Whilst conducting the research I found several posts on online national forums, highlighting the difficulties that adoptive parents were experiencing in identifying their child's DT. Following my own difficulty in identifying DTs, I reflected on how arduous a process this may be for adoptive parents and how this may impact relationships with the school.

In March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic caused the closure of many businesses and services, including all schools within the UK. Shortly prior to the closure, two additional DTs had agreed to participate in the study, however they were both members of their school SLTs and were faced with the sudden closure of their schools and the pressing need to organise immediate provision for their most vulnerable pupils. As a result, they were unable to participate and it was not possible to attempt further recruitment.

Chapter 4. Analysis

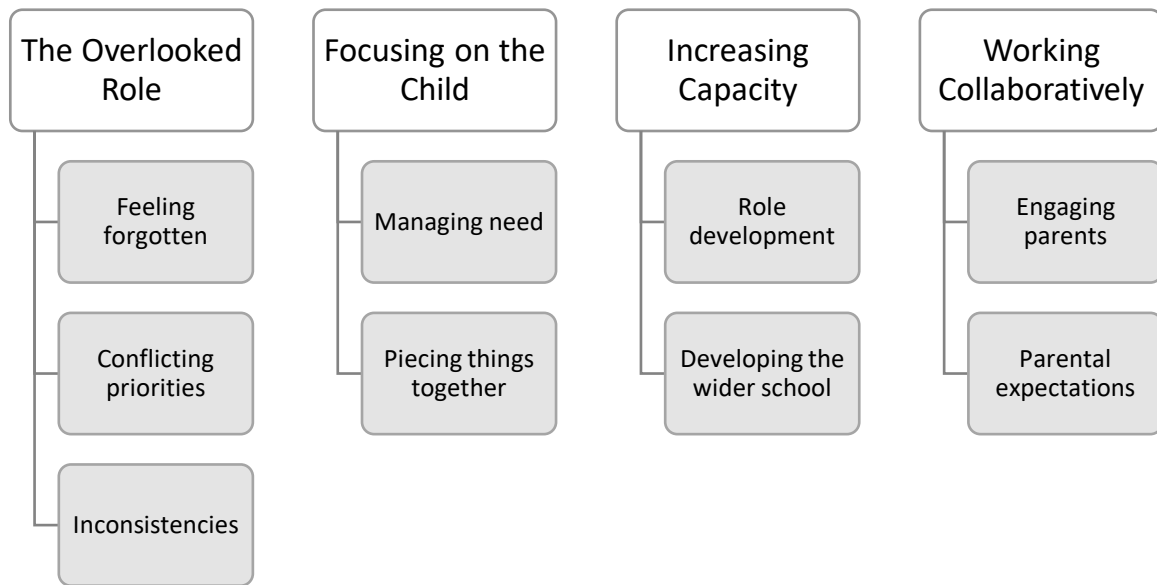
4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to explore the phenomenological and interpretive findings of the research. Four superordinate themes were identified: 'the overlooked role'; 'focusing on the child'; 'increasing capacity'; and 'working collaboratively'. Each superordinate theme has a number of subordinate themes and will be discussed in turn. The superordinate themes and their related subordinate themes are presented in Figure 4.

4.2 Themes

The superordinate and subordinate theme will be presented and discussed in turn. For clarity, tables have been included to provide a visual representation of the prevalence of subordinate themes across the DTs. The following tables show who contributed to each subordinate theme and I have ensured that at least two DTs have contributed for it to be considered a subordinate theme. Transcript examples are provided to present the phenomenological core from which the analysis has developed. Throughout the analysis I have aimed to explore both shared and distinct experiences, thus highlighting the convergence and divergence between the DTs experiences.

Figure 4 Superordinate themes and their related subordinate themes



4.2.1 The Overlooked Role

To develop this superordinate theme, the three subordinate themes were explored in depth; individually for meaning and together for relatedness. I felt that all three subordinate themes, ‘feeling forgotten’, ‘conflicting priorities’ and ‘inconsistencies’ related to each other, as they captured the DTs feelings of being forgotten and the sense of isolation they experienced as a result. This was combined with a sense of frustration about the conflicting priorities they experienced and the resulting inconsistencies within their role. Overall, this led to questions regarding how “seen” they were within their roles and a sense of working within an ‘overlooked role’ as a DT. See table 8 for the related subordinate themes and the prevalence of these across DTs.

Table 8 Subordinate Themes Relating to Superordinate Theme – The Overlooked Role

Subordinate Theme	DT One	DT Two	DT Three
Feeling forgotten	√	√	√
Conflicting priorities	√	√	
Inconsistencies		√	√

4.2.1.1 Feeling forgotten

All three DTs expressed frustration with regard to working with the Virtual School (VS). Two of the DTs expressed a sense of being forgotten by and having limited engagement with the VS, specifically in relation to PLAC:

I did have dealings with the virtual school for [London LA], I had two children there for about three years. But in terms of previously looked after children, I've never had dealings with the virtual school in terms of them (DT Two, lines 164-167)

As I said, I talked to the virtual school it was probably about a year ago. And I just think it'd be nice to keep that updated (DT Three, lines 281-283)

So actually I had two children who were in care for one term and then they moved on. And that's the only time I ever really had any dealings with [local] virtual school (DT Two, lines 161-164)

One DT gave the impression that the sense of being overlooked extended to the visibility of PLAC to the Virtual School:

So whereas with looked after children, obviously there's a lot you know, the social workers and the PEP meetings. But with previously looked after it, there isn't really any support. Not that we need it, necessarily, but I mean if we did, I'm not sure where we would go to (DT one, lines 18-21)

Despite feelings of frustration at being overlooked, there appeared to be an appreciation of the difficulties that the Virtual School faced with regards to capacity:

Only that perhaps that they, that in in our role as the designated teacher we would be able to access the virtual school, because I think it's erm... obviously, they're very stretched because they're dealing with all the looked after children, but it'd be nice if we needed to, we could access their support. (DT one, lines 176-180)

The use of the word “nice” suggests an almost apologetic plea for support, perhaps echoing their own role and the desire for others to be ‘nice’ to them with regards to limits on their capacity as DTs.

Frustration at the lack of support was aimed at the limited role of the external agencies in providing support for DTs and therefore by extension, parents. Two DTs highlighted the extension of their role to cover PLAC did not feel supported by the

remit of others, inferring that the school held the majority of the responsibility for supporting parents and guardians:

I think his mum and dad were struggling a bit in terms of accessing support. So, all the support they had was kind of through us. And, erm you know, us offering him music therapy and that sort of therapy, so erm I don't know how much support, they did get actually through the post-adoption team (DT One, lines 222-226)

So, actually quite a lot for those little ones, for those children at school, when I think about it (DT Two, lines 68-70)

All of the DTs struggled to conceptualise the role of the VS in supporting PLAC, suggesting that the difference in the support provided for PLAC in comparison to LAC was limited and lacked clarity:

They advised that they have a log-on for Britannia, so I know they have resources for Britannia, but I'm not sure how much that would support the children. And so, yeah. I cant say honestly, I don't have I don't get support from them, whether they should or not (DT Two, 167-171)

Almost like a bank of ideas. I mean, when, when I did have the time with a lady from the virtual school she was saying about the online, not dictionary, not thesaurus, encyclopaedia that they're entitled to. And I was thinking, Oh, you know, I didn't know. I didn't know that (DT Three, lines 195-199)

And I know you asked me what I see their role as they told me that their role as soon as children are adopted their role ceases because they don't need to be a parent anymore because the parent and the parent takes over that role (DT Two, lines 158-161)

This contrasted with the high levels of support the DTs reported receiving in respect of LAC, possibly exacerbating the DTs feelings of isolation and having no one to turn to.

This was also evident with regards to what the concerns expressed by DTs about what support would be available if they did experience difficulties:

I think if there was, if there were any concerns or challenges I think we could contact them, but they're not necessarily erm in touch with us in the same way that they would be if we had a looked after child (DT one, lines 26-30)

If you know, if a child was presenting with quite challenging behaviour and we weren't managing, I don't know whether we would just have to go down the usual route that we would any other, not looked after child, and we would have to access that support, or whether it would be nice to know that maybe that we could access other support (DT One, lines 195-200)

You know, or just go to them for advice, and you know, so that they could sign post us to, perhaps other agencies or professionals that we're not aware of. So that would be a good thing (DT One, 183-186)

This suggests that even if it is not being accessed, the DT finds comfort and security in the knowledge that external support would be available, conversely, the lack of clarity as to its existence appears to trigger further feelings of isolation for the DT.

DT Two explored the role of the VS as 'external monitors' and the balance of DTs implementing the agenda of the VS, as well as being able to seek support from them:

So I had a monitoring visit last, not last term in the summer and we came out really well, positive. And I had to query because we did have a parent at the school, asking what their role was specifically (DT Two, lines 155-158)

So when I had my monitoring visit I was able to talk a bit about that in that session and I used some of her wording that she used, but she also then said, "This is the my understanding but I will go away and check it" and she did check that and that was able to be passed on to the parents, so it was like a direct way of saying it (DT Two, lines 238-243)

The usefulness of the monitoring visit was also highlighted, with the visits positioned as a 'double-edge sword'; the benefit of knowledge gained from such visits, balanced against the anxiety that was induced by the prospect of external scrutiny, especially prior to feeling that they had developed sufficient experience in the role:

Although I panicked about it because someone external is coming in, it was very useful and provided a lot of information, but that information could have come before the monitoring. It didn't have to wait to the monitoring, I suppose (DT Two, lines 421-424)

I'm in a position now where monitoring and things like that are regular, and in place, but things like that from the start... so [Local LA] came in and when I had their input it, was you know it's expected that from the moderation, that books are monitored at this... (DT Two, lines 390-394)

4.2.1.2 Conflicting priorities

One DT commented extensively on the different difficulties they faced balancing the priorities they encounter within the role.

The DT acknowledged that decisions about finances were likely to impact many teachers, not just those who are DTs. Notwithstanding this however, it was evident

that they were frustrated about how this may interfere with their ability to provide the most appropriate support:

I think it's the time, any teacher you talk to now about anything it's gonna be a time and funds and a battle between someone having to do budgeting somewhere along the line and making sure those children have the right provision in place (DT Two, lines 382-385)

The use of the word 'battle', with its hostile connotations, alludes to their experience of teachers needing to fight to secure resources both in terms of time and money, in school systems increasingly impacted by reduced budgets.

Conflicting priorities were also evident in relation to day-to-day expectations:

The general day to day things that realistically happen in schools rather than the people that go and write the policies and things like that, probably don't factor in or the virtual schools don't factor in because schools just have to get on with it, and getting on with it can take a while, and some guidance would be good (DT Two, lines 412-417)

This suggests a feeling of frustration that the policies did not reflect their experience of undertaking the role. The tasks they are expected to undertake do not clearly link with the practical realities of the work, implying that they did not feel understood by external parties. This contrasts with the typical sense of autonomy experienced in the role of the DT; frustration at what they should expect from support.

DT Two laughed when discussing the impact of time constraints of the role, appearing to be resigned to the notion that despite needing more time to undertake the role; this was unlikely to be recognised by others. This likely compounded their feelings of being forgotten:

It would be nice if they put in some time allocation for people to do the job. But, I don't think that will go in there! [laughs] (DT Two, lines 357-358)

The DT reflected on their difficulty in balancing the provision of support for the children, with the maintenance of a healthy work-life balance.

You want to have systems for the children to make it better, but also have to reflect on it as a person that has a workload and work life balance (DT Two, lines 368-370)

There is an apparent dilemma evidenced here, which involves supporting the children appropriately, whilst ensuring that there is 'enough left' for the DT. The reality of this tension highlights the level of personal involvement of the DT in the lives of the children they support.

4.2.1.3 Inconsistencies

Two of the DTs spoke about their experience of working without a solid framework for their role. The DTs acknowledged the guidance they had been provided with, however, noted that the role varied from LA to LA, resulting in an inconsistent approach to the role, leading to a desire for a similar approach across services:

I have had designated teacher training from [Local LA]. Yes, which was quite challenging because the children I had in school that were in care were from [London LA]. So I found that there was inconsistencies. And, actually, it would be nice if everyone had similar systems as a teacher (DT Two, 183-187)

For one DT, whilst highlighting this desire for consistency, they reflected on the positive differences they experienced. This suggested that they felt a sense of privilege; the lack of consistency was challenging, yet they still perceived themselves to be in a better position than their colleague who was operating under a different structure:

But actually, I think the [Local LA] system is much more manageable. So I think she's slightly jealous that I ended up with [Local LA] and she's got [Neighbouring LA], just because their online paperwork is more tricky (DT Three, lines 72-75)

The positive reflection on the differences was also highlighted by one DT who reflected on the expectations of their LA and the importance of the structure in addressing the needs of vulnerable local children:

I do like the way [Local LA] have some of their expectations, like the things completed in in the first three weeks of term, I think it's really important that these children are vulnerable and they do need to be higher on everyone's priority (DT Two, lines 190-193)

This suggests that despite their calls for greater consistency, the DTs appeared to appreciate the flexibility within the role where it enabled them to have greater

autonomy in their work and access to processes they saw as more efficient and less prescriptive.

4.2.2 Focusing on the Child

To develop this superordinate theme, the two subordinate themes were explored in depth; individually for meaning and together for relatedness. I felt that both of subordinate themes, 'managing need' and 'piecing things together', related to each other, as they captured the role of the DTs in developing an understanding of the children they worked with and the role of this understanding in supporting the children. Together, the two subordinate themes highlight the ways in which the DTs focus on the children they support. See table 9 for the related subordinate themes and the prevalence of these across DTs.

Table 9 Subordinate Themes Relating to Superordinate Theme – Focusing on the Child

Subordinate Theme	DT One	DT Two	DT Three
Managing need	√	√	√
Piecing things together	√		√

4.2.2.1 Managing needs

All three DTs focused on identifying the types of support needed, as well as their feelings of frustration in relation to the barriers when trying to implement the provision.

DT One highlighted the range of support that they had arranged for their students, reflecting on how widespread the need for this provision was for their students:

But in terms of support that some of the children have needed we have arranged counselling, and play therapy or music therapy, so a lot of our, in fact most of our previously looked after children have been part of some form of therapy, over the years (DT One, lines 99-102)

The DT appeared to express a degree of surprise when reflecting on the level of need with regards to accessing therapy. This was demonstrated by the use of the phrase "in fact", suggesting they were not consciously aware of this at a systemic

level and were instead focusing on need on an individual level. The level of need identified here suggested that the DT is managing a workload that may not be evident to others across the school.

DT One expressed curiosity about the long-term outcomes for PLAC. They appear to express a sense of relief that issues had not presented themselves “yet”, whilst acknowledging the need for therapeutic support to potentially prevent the issues from occurring:

So, I mean out of our six, four of them have needed some, some therapy or other. And the other two, ones... ones only in reception so nothing, you know, nothing has sort of presented itself yet but yeah, so four out of the six have needed some form of therapy or other (DT One, lines 109-113)

This curiosity extended beyond their own PLAC; a wonder as to the general experience of secondary DTs:

I don't know whether secondary school designated teachers have different experiences of post looked after children because, obviously, sort of, when children hit adolescence and puberty whether other traumas, come to the, come to light (DT One, lines 206-210)

But, yeah, because our children have been adopted quite young, I'm not sure that we necessarily see any sort of behaviours that have sort of impacted on their lives, so it might be a different case for their secondary school designated teachers I don't know (DT One, 215-218)

The DT appears to be demonstrating a curiosity about the long-term experience of both the PLAC and the DT; questioning the benefit of intervention at the primary school level and ultimately the efficacy of their own role.

Working within a consistent and stable environment was viewed as important in supporting the children:

As long as our Learning Mentor stays the same, she still has that consistency as well. So, that attachments really, I see that as really important (DT Two, lines 58-61)

I mean, we've been lucky that the ones we've had mainly have stayed on roll and I think the consistency of school is important (DT Two, lines 429-431)

The importance placed on this suggests that it is likely that the DT was acknowledging their own feelings about the need for consistency and stability, highlighting their feelings of uncertainty where this was not evident in their own role and the duties that they were tasked with performing.

Two DTs took the opportunity to reflect on the positive outcomes experienced by the PLAC:

But also liked that attachment development opportunity to have some time with a person, really look forward to that every week and he would say, "Can we do this next week", and "Can we do that next week, I really enjoyed it when we did this", so a bit control over what we do (DT Two, lines 44-48)

Just seeing them grow and just seeing them relax in their environment. And just, I think, as I said, we're quite a nurturing school. So I just think the, feeling that they belong. They belong here. And they belong to us (DT Three, lines 241-244)

I'm safe, I'm here, routines are in place, you know, and I can, I can get on with my learning. And you know, things that have happened in the past haven't gone away, but I'm safe enough to park it on the side and get on (DT Three, lines 245-249)

This suggests that the development of a sense of security, as well as one of belonging is vital for the children in supporting them in the school. The DT reflected on the emotional experience not only of the children, but also the effect it had on themselves observing this.

DT Two placed great importance on being knowledgeable of the work of external agencies, especially where the intervention being provided was time limited:

He also had that time with a tutor, that we had, we had a person that would come in for a day an art teacher, but qualified teacher that would also work with that child and when she moved on I continued that work (DT Two, lines 34-38)

This appears to be a demonstration of the DTs level of confidence in their ability; being able to 'pick up the pieces' and continue the work of others, even where this falls outside of their area of expertise. The DT does not appear to challenge this way of working, however the projection of confidence may be the indication of them being resigned to this added responsibility placed upon them.

DT Two was keen to highlight that the children they worked with were seen as a priority across the school. This status would lead to the children having priority access to support and interventions ahead of the other children, in recognition of the challenges that they faced in comparison to their peers:

So, looked after and previously looked after our priority for, for allocating learning mentor resources, and but if there's no need, we also don't want to have an issue if there's not one (DT Two, lines 62-64)

The DT highlighted the challenge of responding to the needs for the children as a group, while ensuring that the individual needs of the child are recognised and support is not provided simply due to their LAC or PLAC status.

DT Three explored their own difficulties with this situation, however recognised the importance of reflecting on this challenge:

And sometimes if you give a child too much, they end up not benefiting from any of it. You know, we felt we had to, stand back and make really good decisions (DT Three, 37-39)

The DT was keen to find what was 'good enough', thus ensuring that provision was not put in place above and beyond what was required. This position and ability to reflect on the provision, highlights the importance of the DTs experience in gaining a wider understanding of the needs of each individual child, as well as the support available to them.

Despite the impression from this DT of the positive nature of this reflective practice in individual cases, DT Three suggests the need for a bank of resources. The ability to reflect across multiple cases would likely reduce the load on the DTs when trying to address need:

There's a tendency to think they don't need anything else. But to have a, almost have a list of, these are the things we could offer, would be useful. Because then you think, Oh, actually, yeah, that they might benefit from that rather than thinking everything's fine (DT Three, lines 190-194)

The role of external support was evident here insofar that support could be offered as a 'thinking space' to the DT:

We did get extra funding for him, but we didn't, we couldn't really find anything, particularly that we needed to spend it on. So the virtual school helped, helped us think about a bit of extra tuition (DT Three, lines 32-35)

The challenges to providing appropriate support were not always related to knowing what to implement:

Because the child was in a [Additional Resourced Centre] with an EHCP anyway, there wasn't actually a lot of extra provision that we could put in. He was on transport, so he couldn't come before school or after school to do anything additional. So it all had to be sort of squashed within the school day (DT Three, lines 23-28)

This DT discussed their frustration at a child being unable to access particular interventions due to time restrictions. Additional interventions are often delivered prior to and after school, however for children unable to attend at these times, there is a sense of frustration at things having to be 'squashed' in. This gives the impression that that the DTs are having to make the best of the situation, underlining the need for DTs to be flexible in an inflexible system.

4.2.2.2 Piecing things together

The drive to and the challenges in developing, a deeper understanding of the needs of the children is alluded to by two of the DTs. The importance of this was highlighted through this DTs perspective on the value of information sharing in developing a holistic picture of the child:

And but when I went to some of the meetings at [Head Office] about the child with the foster parents and the birth family, social workers, that's when I started to join things up together (DT Three, lines 28-30)

This appears to suggest that without access to the wider sources of information about the child, they would not have been able to develop an informed, holistic, perspective of the child. Conversely, this highlights the challenges they face in working in isolation.

The DT acknowledged that while useful, having access to this information did not lead to a straightforward 'diagnosis' of need. Instead DTs were faced with the ongoing challenge of trying to understand how the different aspects of their lives influence their presentation:

Lots of his behaviour, it could be limited on standard language, it could be settling in, it could be attachment issues, or it could be to do with his, you know, early, early life first two years when he lived in not a very nice environment. So and you sometimes you just don't know, which, which bits are which (DT Three, 112-117)

This description presented the child as a jigsaw puzzle, with the DT appearing to be trying to put the pieces together to try to create a clearer picture of the child's needs. This DT alludes to the dilemma faced in trying to understand and differentiate between the impact of early life experiences and those of more pervasive SEN difficulties.

One DT highlighted further challenges they faced with the construction of this puzzle. Despite gathering information from a range of sources, the DT acknowledged that they could not truly know the experiences of the child prior to achieving permanence. As a result, there is an element of 'being in the dark' about a fundamental aspect of their lived experience, and in the absence of a clear picture, therapy is somewhat positioned as a default response to addressing their presenting needs:

I think, I mean it's through erm how they've presented in terms of their behaviour. And erm certainly, I mean I don't know what traumas they've experienced post... pre-adoption. But I think, it has impacted on them, and they have, it's been felt that they would benefit from erm some kind of therapy (DT one, line 105-109)

The use of the word 'lucky' is interesting. It appears almost an oxymoron, acknowledging the growing professional understanding of the pervasive impact of trauma, yet suggesting that the children have been spared the worst of it.

I don't know that they do, to be honest and I do wonder, you know, if, I mean, these children have been lucky, their kind of, their traumas, aren't having a big impact on their everyday lives (DT One, lines 192-194)

This may suggest that the DTs may not be able to rely on more obvious markers to signify that a child is experiencing difficulties, highlighting the need to look beyond the ways in which the child is presenting, as this may not be congruent with their needs.

DT Two spoke about the range of children attending their school, noting that there was a range of need and ability across the group of children:

We've got a range of children, children with a range of abilities that fall under that heading. We have children who are... we have a three of our children are adopted one, and two under special guardianship orders, and then a breadth of need, or non-need amongst those (DT two, lines 3-7)

One of them was exceeding in one area. One of them is on the SEN register. And so, there's definitely not one rule for all of them (DT Two, lines 8-9)

The DT was keen to highlight the importance of staff in seeing the children as individuals and not as a homogeneous group:

It's really nice to look at them, and see they're all individuals they're not "Oh those former looked after children", they are, everyone sees them as just members of their class, individuals. I really like that (DT Two, 256-259)

Despite their insistence that people should see past the children's labels, the DT was curious as to the possibility of differences in need and therefore a need for different approaches based on the legal status of the children:

I don't know how I feel about that. Because if a child is adopted then they've obviously, that responsibility has been passed over to somebody who's become a parent. So should we differentiate maybe between the status of, you know, different looked after categories, possibly if there's a special guardianship order or access arrangement, child arrangement order (DT Two, 172-177)

This demonstrated the personal conflict the DT experienced in taking these seemingly opposing stances about labelling. This suggests a dilemma about the concepts of both grouping and dealing with the individual.

The DT goes on to suggest that the differentiation of support likely extends beyond themselves, to the provision of support from the VS:

Maybe very different need between those children, possibly, maybe the virtual school could be more prominent in that I think they probably could, but not necessarily in all those categories (DT two, lines 177-180)

This appears to suggest that the DT felt that the provision of support from the VS should also be weighted differently across the different legal statuses of PLAC. The DT did not however give any indication of who they felt received more attention, perhaps purposely avoiding making that distinction due to their own feelings of discomfort at utilising the very labels they suggest avoiding.

4.2.3 Increasing Capacity

To develop this superordinate theme, the two subordinate themes were explored in depth; individually for meaning and together for relatedness. I felt that both subordinate themes, 'role development' and 'developing the wider school', related to each other, as they captured the challenges the DTs faced in developing their own knowledge and understanding and that of the staff within the school. See table 10 for the related subordinate themes and the prevalence of these across DTs.

Table 10 Subordinate Themes Relating to Superordinate Theme – Increasing Capacity

Subordinate Theme	DT One	DT Two	DT Three
Role development	√	√	√
Developing the wider school	√	√	√

4.2.3.1 Role development

All of the DTs spoke about the importance of developing in their role in terms of their understanding and experience. The timing of support was emphasised, with the DTs each reflecting on the experience of needing to 'get on' with the task. Two of the DTs highlighted the need for support in the early stages of being a DT:

And its like, I've done the meetings before so I know what sort of things you're going to ask and things like that, but where do I start, gathering, putting all the paperwork and things like that. And that wasn't easy and the social worker was also new to role. So, it was quite challenging (DT Two, line 318-322)

DT Three suggested that their prior experience was useful in aiding their understanding of the process, however this did little to aid their feelings of competence when venturing into the unknowns of the new role.

I think, well, when I first started, help getting my head around the financial side of it, would have be useful and I think more ideas of things that we can put in, for any looked after or previously looked after child (DT Three, lines 181-184)

Similarly, this DT suggested that they required practical support in order to transition into their new role, implying that these needs may have been overlooked.

At the start of the role, feelings of competence were extrinsically linked to the DTs understanding of their remit. Despite their 'long' experience of working in various guises supporting children, the DT gives the impression of feeling unprepared after almost 'falling' into the role:

So my very first one I had to do for [Local LA], PEP. I didn't even have a login or anything and I'd emailed around weeks before going, "Do I need to do something for this meeting, but it's [Local LA], I've never done it, what do I need to do, what do I need to do?" And found that there was no one could say, "Oh, yeah, here you go etc etc etc" (DT Two, line 313-318)

I'd been involved in the child protection since reception. So it was a long, long journey. And at that point, I was then asked to be the designated teacher and I really did not have a clue what I was doing (DT Three, lines 5-8)

The DT further reflected on the uncertainties they faced prior to being given sufficient support. Moreover, highlighting how this need may have been masked by their prior experience aiding their ability to 'get on' with the tasks presented to them:

And first of all, she just said I'd have to do a form for this child and miraculously I did it really well. So they didn't realise that I'd not done it before. But I think it's because I knew the child really well, rather than I knew the procedures (DT Three, lines 14-18)

The DT relays their feelings of unconscious incompetence, implying that they 'did not know what they did not know':

There's one question I can't remember what it was all about. And I thought I've got no idea. So we contacted the virtual school, they sent somebody to train me and I suddenly realised that it was sheer fluke that I've done this paperwork (DT Three, lines 18-21)

The use of the terms 'miraculously' and 'sheer fluke' appears to highlight not only the challenges the DT faced, but their sense of surprise at being able to overcome them. The DT is aware of their level of competence and this suggests some realisation of the difficulty of the tasks that lay ahead. It did not appear as if this realisation helped to develop their feelings of competence.

Training was viewed as a potentially useful method of support; however all of the DTs raised the difficulties they had experienced accessing the formal training provided by the VS. One DT described having only a 'vague understanding' of the role (Three, line 53), highlighting the desire early on in the role for support and the sense of frustration that this did not occur:

So that's basically my journey and my sort of vague understanding. I've also booked on to do some training, a days training, but unfortunately, the course was cancelled (DT Three, lines 53-54)

DT Three alluded to their sense of waiting to be remembered by the VS:

So I'm still waiting for them to come back and say we're running it okay, on this day [laughs] (DT Three, 57-58)

The DT laughing appeared incongruent with their visible frustration, however this feeling was highlighted by their emphasis on the word 'still', potentially in relation to their feeling of being overlooked for the valuable training.

DT One had managed to access group training, reporting its utility and implying that it had aided their ability:

I did recently go on the training for erm previously looked after children, you know the designated teacher training so... and that was really interesting and informative (DT One, lines 8-11)

Where group training had not been accessible, the DT was able to arrange individual training from their VS:

So I knew the family, knew the background, knew exactly what led up to it, but to begin with had absolutely no idea about the role as the designated person, I then had somebody from the virtual school come to train me, which was really, really useful (DT Three, lines 10-14)

The repetition of the word “really”, emphasised an apparent sense of relief at being able to access this support, helping the DT to move on from a position of “having no idea”.

One DT however lamented the challenges they faced in being trained by one LA and supporting children from another:

I have had designated teacher training from [Local LA]. Yes, which was quite challenging because the children I had in school that were in care were from [London LA]. So I found that there was inconsistencies (DT Two, lines 183-186)

This highlighted a concern that the inconsistencies between LAs would limit the benefit in practice and perhaps drew upon their other experiences of inconsistency across the role.

Concern was raised by two of the DTs about the relevance of the training, including its potential similarity to previous training, however highlighted a desire to not ‘miss out’ on anything of importance. This stance is potentially influenced by attendance needing to be balanced with the competing demands of the role:

And like I said before, I think am I going over the same stuff, is the training being relevant to your role? (DT Two, lines 385-387)

But I sort of felt because I'd had this individual tuition from somebody from the virtual school, actually, I wasn't sure whether there was going to be a lot of overlap, which they suggested that it might be worth just going and making sure that we covered everything (DT Three, lines 61-65)

DT One emphasised the importance for varied training, highlighting its role in helping the DT to understand the impact of children’s emotional needs on their wellbeing:

I, so I have been on erm some attachment aware training in the erm trauma perceptive practice, so in terms, I think that has really helped my practice because it's kind of, you know, it's made it's made you aware of, certainly, all the erm, studies around the adverse childhood experiences (DT One, lines 134-138)

DT Two however disagreed as to the focus of the support, lamenting the priority afforded to preparing for external scrutiny. This appeared to imply that they did not feel that being readied for this scrutiny was as helpful to their role, as being supported to understand the practical tasks of their role, the concept of ‘having their files in order’:

You know there's nothing concrete that says that, you know this would be good practice and having that from the start, rather than have your files in order, we're being readied for Ofsted (DT Two, lines 394-397)

This frustration was further evident in their concern that the training bore scant resemblance to the needs of their day-to-day role:

You don't want to be taught how to fill in a form, but you want to be taught what you might expect, this is the sequence and this is what they expect (DT Two, lines 387-389)

The value of having a personal investment in developing their understanding of the emotional aspects of their practice was explored by one DT:

So I'm really interested in, that area, because I think, you know, all these children have obviously had quite a few {traumatic experiences}, in their young, in their short lives, so that training has really helped my practice I think (DT One, lines 138-141)

The DT highlights the importance of ‘buying into’ the concept of training, especially when covering difficult or sensitive topics.

The DTs typically had limited interaction with other DTs outside of their linked schools, resulting in a curiosity about ‘other’ DTs and the support available elsewhere. The DT appears curious as to what other DTs might benefit from; information that would perhaps illuminate the knowledge and experience of the other DTs in comparison to their own feelings of competence:

And I know having spoken to other designated teachers for looked after children that they've done a range, and they're all very different in their expectations (DT Two, lines 187-190)

The DTs spoke positively about the informal support they received from their headteachers, both of whom had DT experience. The use of the word ‘lucky’ (DT

Two, line 325) gives the impression not only of surprise, but also demonstrating how much the support is valued.

Well I said my headteacher is the designated teacher, for the child in our school from [Neighbouring LA], so she's done all the [Neighbouring LA] training so we do informally liaise about that (DT Three, lines 69-71)

So I'm lucky enough now to have a head teacher who's a SENCO, who also did the designated teacher role, so I've been able to know that I can go to her if there's anything I need to go to and she'll be very open and honest in terms of what we can or can't fund, or have or haven't funded and things like that when I need to know (DT Two, lines 325-330)

DT Two reflected on their use of support from their headteacher, highlighting a sense of security in having a 'more knowledgeable other' to turn to in times of doubt, potentially reducing feelings of isolation. It is interesting however, the notion that they 'always' check with their headteacher. This may suggest that this level of support, although useful perceived as useful by the DT; may unconsciously be affecting the feelings of competency and thus the agency of the DT.

I think I'm at the point now where I'm okay with it, but I would always so, I double check with my head before proceeding with anything I was unsure about (DT Two, lines 336-339)

DT three expresses a desire to look beyond their immediate support. Interestingly, this was the only DT not to have attended training and have any experience of engaging with DTs outside of their link schools. This expressed feeling of missing out could be linked to their sense of isolation and the feelings of having limited scope to address this:

Well we are we in a MAT so we talk, we talk to the other [number] schools. But I think, I think it'd be useful to have a wider, but I do wonder if I'd gone on the training day, that would have been the time that I would have picked up ideas from other schools (DT Three, lines 213-216)

But I think sometimes just getting out there and talking to other teachers about the role and what other schools are doing, would be beneficial, and hopefully have an impact on what happens here (DT Three, lines 286-289)

I don't really think there's a, formal way of doing it, but I think that would be useful. It doesn't have to be formal, but just something so you can go, oh, actually, no, I haven't thought of that. Yeah, that child does need, and you almost need that prompt (DT Three, lines 217-221)

But sometimes you miss bits. With the best will in the world, but to have somebody else go, "Oh, yeah, we've done that with our..." (DT Three, lines 222-224)

4.2.3.2 Developing the wider school

The importance of staff development was explored by all three DTs. The DTs reflected on being responsible for promoting and delivering training, as well as the challenges they faced in doing balancing the priorities of the wider school system.

Here, this DT was keen to recognise the experience of their staff and appeared to want to ensure that they emphasised their belief in their ability:

Well, I do think we need to do some more work on attachment. As a school. I think we did a lot of work probably about five years ago. So people like me who've been here forever, have got that, but we thought we've got quite a lot of new staff come in, and they're all fabulous, don't get me wrong, but maybe we need to go back and revisit the attachment stuff and the implications (DT Three, lines 253-258)

The DT appears to be mindful of not appearing overly critical and takes great care to ensure that they highlight the strengths of their staff with regards to their experience, whilst still maintaining a position of encouraging staff development. The DT posits such development as an ongoing process, rather than a one-off, tick-box exercise.

For two of the DTs, attachment awareness was seen as the key area of training in enabling staff to understand the needs of children:

Yeah, I think basic attachment awareness, and how children, the way they might present in class and girls might present different to boys, you know, and things like that and that's the only thing I'd like to see... not the only thing I'd like to see, but the thing I could see, being... making things better (DT Two, lines 362-366)

I think the attachment awareness in school is something that's really important. I think that's a basic understanding of attachment. Because, communicating values and things like that needs to be taken into account and again I'm not saying that I've got children with those sorts of needs but it could easily be (DT Two, line 345-349)

DT Two highlights that although they did not believe that any of their current children had significant attachment difficulties, they were able to imagine a future where this could be the case. This stance placed an emphasis on readiness; supporting staff to be proactive rather than reactive.

DT One indicated that they recognised the value of attachment training and would welcome it, however, their reflection suggests a tension between their personal perspective on the importance of the training and having to adhere to the overall school development plan:

I know you can become attachment, erm, an attachment aware school. And so that is something that I've looked into in the past, but obviously we're going as a, as a school, we are going through the trauma perceptive practice training (DT One, 127-131)

DT Two had a similar experience regarding the tension between their priorities as a DT and adhering to those of the wider school. The DT appeared to be frustrated at the decision not to prioritise the training, suggesting a sense of helplessness in undertaking their role.

So I do feel the, you know, attachment is something that as a school we would benefit from having an awareness of and I know they do attachment awareness school training, but at the moment it's not one of the schools priorities... And that is the key for the children, that sort of training (DT Two, lines 279-284)

It appeared that the DT was keen to stay 'on message' in respect of the decision not to undertake attachment aware training. It was interesting however, that the DT appeared to betray their real feelings, by after a long considerate pause, highlighting that the training is "key for the children".

The DT goes on to suggest that the training should be "compulsory", a position that would perhaps reduce the conflict between their desires and that of the decision makers, whilst in turn placing the training on an important footing.

So I think, if they could out that as a compulsory thing about having an attachment awareness, I think would be important (DT Two, lines 354-356)

One DT reflected on the need to embed the learning from training, as well as the complexities of implementing and embedding change. The DT suggests that PLAC may be inadvertently overlooked, although they are keen to emphasise that they are

not purposely overlooking them. This further highlights the role the DT plays in bringing their needs to the attention of staff:

And I think it's just about slipping all those expectations into the daily running of the school so that everyone knows, you know, I'll get his book, when you're looking at books, when it's the pupil voice, make sure if possible, you can include that, that child and so on (DT Three, lines 47-51)

I think... sometimes the subject leaders, they understand why, those children needs to be included in you know, any scrutiny but, I think looked after children, its quite obvious, but maybe the previously looked after children it's not as obvious (DT Three, lines 230-234)

And it's not that they don't do it, it's just they need to be prompted (DT Three, lines 236-237)

The DT highlights their responsibility, not only to the children, but to the staff in supporting their work and the need for a culture shift in how staff ultimately work with PLAC. The DT demonstrates an understanding of the challenges of the work of the teachers, as well as a desire to ensure that PLAC are afforded the same focus as LAC.

4.2.4 Working Collaboratively

To develop this superordinate theme, the two subordinate themes were explored in depth; individually for meaning and together for relatedness. I felt that both subordinate themes, 'engaging parents' and 'parental expectations', related to each other, as they captured the important role played by parents, carers and guardians, the desire of DTs to engage with them and the challenges they faced in respect of engaging with them, as well as managing their expectations. See table 11 for the related subordinate themes and the prevalence of these across DTs.

Table 11 Subordinate Themes Relating to Superordinate Theme – Working Collaboratively

Subordinate Theme	DT One	DT Two	DT Three
Engaging parents	√	√	√
Parental expectations	√	√	√

4.2.4.1 Engaging parents

Engagement with parents was discussed initially in practical terms, with DT Two highlighting the need to gather information from parents for the purpose of applying for Pupil Premium (PP) funding. This was not distinct to PLAC and PP+ however; the DT insisted that this information was requested in respect of any child who may be eligible for any of the variations of PP funding:

So we do this in terms of pupil premium in general. It's promoted to parents that it would support the school and the provision that we are able to give to children, if we are aware of National Insurance numbers so that we can, you know, claim for the additional funds to meet the provision. And that is the extent of it (DT Two, lines 129-133)

Parents and guardians are not obligated to disclose the PLAC status of their child.

DT guidance does, however, recommend that teachers encourage parents and guardians to inform the school if their child is eligible for PP+ funding. DT One highlighted the difficulty in gaining this information, inferring that they did not have a clear process for doing so and in their example, at times this information was learned because they “sort of found out”.

Some of whom you sort of found out, just through osmosis really, just kind of have “Oh, I didn't know that” (DT One, 52-54)

The use of the term “osmosis” is very telling with regards to the difficulties the DTs face with trying to learn of a child’s legal status, that it is at times something that just occurs. This contrasts with LAC, whereby the information about their care status is readily available to the DTs.

DT One went on to explain the sensitivity required in approaching this subject with parents and guardians and being mindful of respecting the rights of the parents and guardians who may not want their family to be identified as ‘different’:

I've kind of erm informally approached them, because, you know, you need to be sensitive to erm, to what they've what gone through and, you know, what they've done for the child (DT One, lines 81-83)

The conflict the DT experienced was apparent; the potential benefit of being aware of a child's PLAC status and the subsequent support this attracts, balanced with the recognition of the right for the family to decide what information to share and with whom.

For some parents, there did not appear to be a need to access support, however, the DT highlighted that the knowledge of their existence alone was beneficial:

So for the parents, knowing that there is a designated teacher I think it's been really good for them because otherwise they might not have known who to approach. It's just a kind of, you know, can't think of the word, it's seamless I guess (DT One, lines 45-49)

All of the DTs spoke about the importance of building relationships with the parents and carers. There appeared to be a sense that relationships were the foundation from which information was shared and work was undertaken:

It's because we get into relationships with our parents, they then tell us and then we tell them so we don't advertise. You know if your child is previously looked after they get this, but we identify when they are because we build relationships with parents (DT Three, lines 167-171)

This suggests that the building and maintenance of relationships across the school enabled parents to feel safe to reveal their child's adoptive status, however there is a recognition that the DT was reluctant to actively seek out this information, instead relying on the strength of the relationships to enable this dialogue.

The DTs all recognised the valuable role that communication plays when working cooperatively with parents to meet the needs of their children:

Because there should be regular communication if something's not quite right at school, or it would come from a parent request to say "I'm concerned XYZ". And then we can look into the, whether it's something that as a school we can address within our means or within our, you know our skills (DT Two, lines 116-121)

The DTs use of and emphasis on the phrase 'should be', suggests an acknowledgement that although it is the desired process for communication to be consistent between the school

and parents, there are barriers – sometimes unspoken, that at times prevent this from happening.

Two of the DTs explored the idea of parents working together, with suggestions to however there were varied approaches to facilitating this, with only DT One supporting the direct facilitation of a parent group:

The parents have through contact with us, set up a support group for each other. And we sort of, we facilitate that to some extent and so that's been really good (DT One, lines 43-45)

And we've gone through it that way. So it's kind of like an informal, but now that they've got the erm... So what they do now actually, now that they've got their group, kind of the chairperson will often email me asking me, you know, certain questions about the funding and what they're entitled to and that sort of thing (DT One, lines 85-90)

This gives the impression of there being an informative yet hands off approach to supporting the group members. It is interesting however, that the scope of the support issued appeared to be limited to practical concerns, with more abstract concerns viewed as being dealt with 'elsewhere':

If there have been issues, they erm tend to go back to the, forgot what its called... the post adoption team that's it. Yeah, they tend to, kind of work through them really if there's been any issues (DT One, 96-99)

DT Three, who was not working with parent groups, expressed curiosity as to the utility of bringing parents together:

So maybe it's about trying to draw them in so they can sort of support each other and share their own different experiences (DT Three, lines 147-149)

I think it's very much on a case by case scenario, and I'm not sure that's the best way of doing it, because I do wonder whether the other family would benefit from talking more to this family and realising that they're not the only ones in this position? And I wonder if they feel isolated? (DT Three, 138-142)

Although the DT is referring to the parents and carers they work with, the concerns about 'not being the only one' or worries about feeling 'isolated' also relate to how they discuss their own role as a DT. This ability to relate could be beneficial in helping to engage parents, however or It could be implied that the DT is projecting their own feelings onto the parents who may not wish to identify as part of such a

group. Interestingly, they were the only DT unable to access group training and had expressed their own feelings of isolation in their role.

DT Three highlighted a need to improve the overall support that they offered to the families they work with:

I think in terms of supporting their families, I think that's where maybe we don't do enough (DT Three, lines 108-109)

So I think it's the supporting the families, that maybe, we need to do a bit more work on (DT Three, lines 132-134)

The statements “we don’t do enough” and “we need to do a bit more” implied a sense of the struggle to undertake the numerous aspects of the role. There is a desire to do more, yet the DT appears to be hinting at a limitation in their ability to do so. The use of ‘we’ implies a shared approach and responsibility to improving communication, a somewhat different stance to the isolated approach

Two of the DTs reflected on the level of engagement with the families. DT Two expressed a recognition of needing to “do better”, manifested as a result of feedback from parents:

That's something that we've been made aware of that we could do better, in the past, so when a parents said well why is my child doing that? And so from that point I caught up with her regularly when I was working with her child (DT Two, lines 97-100)

In this case, the DT explores how feedback is used to develop the provision for individual children, however, this suggests that the DT is being reactive, rather than proactive in their approach. The DT appears to empathise with parents, yet seems surprised by the questioning from the parents and the implication that they should already be aware of the parents need to understand this.

Similarly, DT Three recognised the need to not only make changes, but also publicise what they do with regards to support:

Yeah, we need to work on something, both broad and then with a you know, but obviously, this provision doesn't meet all the needs. So we tailor things, I think we're good at the tailoring bit, but we're not so good at saying, publicising (DT Three, lines 159-162)

The DT identifies the importance of communication in building and maintaining close working links with parents. Having raised concerns about information not being shared with them as a DT from agencies such as the VS, the DT appears to replicate this in their own limited information sharing, however, appears unaware of the parallels between the two.

4.2.4.2 Parental expectations

All of the DTs spoke about the challenges of understanding and managing the expectations of parents, carers and guardians. Meeting the expectations of parents and providing support for the children was not a straightforward process; the DTs highlighted an imbalance between parental expectations and the reality of the role of the DT:

The biggest challenge was parents understanding how our funds and things are used and calculated (DT Two, 234-236)

The use of the phrase “biggest challenge” suggests an ongoing difficulty, weighing heavily on the DT, seemingly more so than other tasks in the DT role. The parental concern about funds, potentially mirrors their own worries about the provision of funding and the impact on interventions that are subsequently provided by the school.

Two of the DTs reflected on sharing information with parents about work undertaken with their children:

And another parent has requested a bit more information about interventions and things like that which has been sort of, reflected on and plan for in the new round that class teachers will have their discussion (DT Two, lines 112-115)

Okay so the young, the mother of the child in reception has been very proactive, so she arranged a meeting with me, in the last summer. And, we talked about what she was entitled to. And she was very knowledgeable anyway, actually (DT One, lines 65-68)

Describing the parent as 'proactive' suggests a sense of joint responsibility, potentially reducing the load on the DT. The DT does however, appear surprised at their level of research and understanding of their child's needs and entitlements, suggesting that this is not common amongst the parents of PLAC in their school.

The research by parents, although welcomed, appeared to be a cause of frustration for DTs when the gathered information misrepresented the realities of the role. One DT indicated a desire for parents to develop a greater understanding of how funds are allocated and used, potentially reducing the strain felt by DTs when this is challenged by parents:

I know one of our parents when they were new, and it was an adopted arrangement was saying, "Our child has designated funds, what are they being used for?" An understanding around it not being ring fenced and, and how it used, that ethos of how the money is used and where its allocated (DT Two, line 220-224)

Further to this, there was a sense that the DT typically felt alone at managing this frustration, highlighting a sense of relief at being able to access 'neutral' support to deliver difficult messages:

Also its when the head teachers also. obviously because they're in control of budgets, they need to also be able to say this is how, and actually, it's quite challenging because the parents do a lot of reading around it but it was actually a bit of interpretation and things like that that needed clarifying, which is where the virtual school helped (DT Two, lines 243-249)

The Virtual School appears to provide a buffer both practically and metaphorically, relieving the DT of the responsibility of being the only professional with a remit to mediate parental concerns about accessing interventions. The DT recognised the advantage of being able to utilise the seniority of both the head teacher and the Virtual School, perhaps at times when they felt this was lacking in their role.

DT Three hinted at a tension between the DT's and parents in understanding and responding to the presentation and needs of the children. The difference in opinion

was apparent in the exploration of the root causes of difficulties the children were facing:

We see things at school that we put down to speech and language difficulties, but when you talk to parents, they can see it from attachment and from early life experiences (DT Three, lines 118-120)

So they've had him for quite a time, he's spent more of his life with them than his birth family, but I get the impression that they felt as if they need more support about understanding how his difficulties now may be related or may not be related. I think sometimes they think everything is related to those early... (DT Three, lines 122-127)

This appeared to be quite an emotive agenda for the DT, perhaps out of concern at not being able to find a consensus on how to meet the needs of the child and exposing the fragility of the partnership with the parents.

Further to this, DT Two appears to attempt to try to balance the need for prioritising and implementing appropriate interventions, with the acknowledgement of the distress of parents themselves trying to understand their children and the functions of the school system.

Obviously the children are within everybody's watchful eye. But the feeling they had from outside is that more needed to be done, but the child doesn't need additional provision for anything, then there's nothing more to provide (DT Two, lines 226-230)

The use of the word "obviously" implies that it should be clear to those on the 'outside' of the school, such as parents, that the needs of the child are of everyone's concern, however this also suggests that they do not always feel 'believed'. This feeling of the DT not being trusted suggests tension between the DTs professional judgement and that of the parents.

In contrast, this DT expressed their support for a parents decision to access external support:

Her mother decided that through the post-adoption group she would arrange some external counselling. And I think that had more of an impact (DT One, lines 146-148)

This suggests that the DT, perhaps acknowledging the limits of their own professional capacity, as well as the importance of working with key partners, both internal and external to the LA system; recognised the utility of external support as a component of the wider support around the child.

4.3 Summary of Findings

The suggestion of 'feeling overlooked' and finding it difficult to access support was apparent throughout the DTs experiences, including the difficulties with feeling isolated and attempting to manage conflicting priorities and the inconsistencies apparent in their developing role working with PLAC. The DTs appeared to place an emphasis on the importance of 'focusing on the child', highlighting the challenges with identifying and meeting the needs of children, however, this induced a number of difficulties such as ensuring the recognition of the children as individuals and addressing needs that may be different to the needs of LAC. The DTs stressed the importance of 'increasing capacity' and emphasised the importance of being able to access timely and relevant training and support, as well as fulfilling their responsibility to assist in the development of the wider staff body and the overall school ethos. Finally, the DTs highlighted the role of parents and guardians in 'working collaboratively' to address the needs of PLAC, emphasising the need to develop and maintain relationships with parents and carers, whilst reflecting on the challenges of having different perspectives on needs and interventions.

Reflection:

Analysing the interviews, I was surprised at the level of frustration experienced by the DTs, especially as they appeared to try hard to focus on the positives on their role and be as understanding as possible of the difficulties faced by others, such as the VSH. The DTs appeared to take their role in developing others seriously, however, I felt that this was in contrast to the importance they felt others placed on developing the DTs. I also felt that working with parents and carers was seen as an opportunity, however, the tension in these relationships was clear to me. I wondered how aware parents and carers were of these tensions and the impact on school-parent relationship.

Chapter 5. Discussion

The aim of this chapter is to review the findings in relation to my research question. I will consider how the DTs experiences relate to psychological theory and corroborate existing literature. I will discuss how the findings illuminate previous research and explore how existing literature can support the exploration of these findings.

The research aimed to answer the following research question:

How do Designated Teachers experience supporting previously looked after children in primary school?

5.1 Discussion of the Findings

Four superordinate themes emerged from the interpretive analysis, which helps to develop an understanding in relation to the research question. The superordinate themes that emerged were: 'the overlooked role', 'focusing on the child', 'increasing capacity' and 'working collaboratively'. These will be presented and discussed in turn.

5.2 The Overlooked Role

The role of the VSH became a statutory requirement in 2014 as a result of the Children and Families Act 2014 [CFA]. The aim of this was to promote the educational achievement of the local authority's looked after children, irrespective of where they live or are educated (DfE, 2014b). Under the Children's Act 1989, LA's have a responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child looked after by them. This responsibility includes a duty to promote the child's educational achievement. The role of the VSH is praised in a number of studies, highlighting their role in multi-agency working, holding school staff to account and supporting social workers in their engagement with schools. The initial evaluation of the pilot scheme (Berridge, Henry, Jackson and Turney, 2009) found that the more senior the VSHs were, the better they were able to exert pressure on headteachers in respect of

matters such as admissions and the exclusion of LAC. The evaluation also found that the VSH introduced a 'more strategic approach' to some of the previously identified weaknesses; this included inadequate record keeping, a lack of attention paid to school non-attendance, the poor quality of PEPs and a failure to work affectively with foster carers. In this study, all of the DTs spoke positively about the VSH, including the impact of DT training and one-to-one support. I note however, that these positive remarks were largely limited to their work with LAC.

In 2017 the Children and Social Work Act (2017) further amended the 1989 Act to extend the VSH and DT duty to include PLAC. Soon after the statutory changes were operationalised in 2018, the Chair of the National Association for Virtual School Heads (NAVSH) agreed that due to their experience in supporting LAC that they were best positioned to support PLAC, additionally indicating that many of the changes in the statutory guidance were what many considered 'best practice' (Kelly, 2018). Despite this enthusiasm however, they voiced concern about the impact on VSH workloads in relation to the newly extended role and a lack of clarity with respect to how this would be operationalised.

The guidance suggests that with regards to PLAC, VSH's should 'promote their educational achievement through the provision of information and advice to their parents, educators and others who the VSH considers necessary' (DfE, 2018d, p.25). In this study however, it was apparent that the DTs were unclear how this worked in practice, frequently highlighting that they were unsure of what the VSH did in respect of PLAC.

Barnes (2008) suggests that working co-operatively through multi-agency activity is an effective way to provide a 'child-centred' response to the needs of children. As

Cheminais (2009) contends however, multi-agency work can lead to role confusion and difficulty in adapting to new ways of working, especially where there are competing priorities and expectations. In this study, the DTs raised frustrations that the support they received in relation to PLAC was limited in comparison to that which they received for LAC. This possibly led to them questioning not only how "seen" they were by the VSH, but also the strength and stability of the relationship between the DT and the VSH. The DTs appeared to be clear in their understanding of how VSHs supported LAC, however suggestions that the VSH 'disappeared' and questions about what the VSH actually did in relation to PLAC; suggest that this relationship may have been strained due to a lack of clarity. It may therefore, be beneficial for the relationship between the VSH and the DT to be explored and operationalised. In addition, the DT may benefit from working in conjunction with the VSH to outline their roles, the convergence and divergence and the ways in which it differs to their individual roles within their existing working relationship supporting LAC.

5.3 Focusing on the Child

Many looked after and previously looked after children have experienced disruptions to their learning have missed extended periods of education and many have SEN. These factors mean that gaps in the child learning and the emotional impact of their early life experiences, could 'become significant barriers to their progress' (DfE, 2018a, p. 8). Due to the complexity of the children's experiences, gaining an understanding of their needs requires careful assessment and planning.

Selwyn et al. (2014) explained that assessing the needs of adopted children can be difficult. 'Children... had multiple and overlapping difficulties and had often not received appropriate interventions or support' (p. 88). In this study, the DTs

highlighted the difficulties faced by themselves class teachers and parents in trying to identify the root cause of a child's needs. The DTs highlighted the challenges they faced trying to manage needs when their views differed. The DTs reported having limited information about what was happening for their children, due to information always being communicated in a structured fashion. This was at times, compared to the amount of information they had access to in respect of LAC, such as the use of the PEP. The findings from this study suggests that DTs may benefit from a similar, more structured cumulative approach to information sharing such as the implementation of the EPAC.

The SEND CoP (DfE, 2014c) outlines that children can have special educational needs in one or more of the following areas- communication and interaction; cognition and learning; social emotional and mental health (SEMH); and sensory and/or physical. Gore Langton and Boy (2017) remind that each of these areas of development can be impacted by developmental trauma. The category of SEMH replaces behaviour as a category of need acknowledging that behaviour is a communication or symptom of a need.

It is not always straight forward to gain information about a child; it can be difficult to gain a comprehensive understanding of the child with such gaps. There are a number of reasons that information is not shared amongst professionals, including a fear of sharing too much or with the wrong person. To allay those fears, and provide a framework, non-statutory guidance was produced (DfE, 2018e).

Sunderland (2018) stresses the importance of considering a child's experiences 'before rushing to a diagnosis of SEN'. She argues that while many diagnoses are accurate; adopting a trauma informed approach would lead to greater diagnostic

accuracy. Sunderland advocates professionals asking not only “why is he behaving like this”, but also “what has happened to him”, suggesting that the latter typically informs the former. For PLAC, developing an understanding of the factors impacting behaviour can have the added difficulty of there being a lack of, or incomplete information, leading to an incomplete picture of the child’s needs.

The DTs in this study found that their views at times differed from those of the parents or class teacher, however, noted that this was often as a result of having incomplete information about the child. They appeared frustrated that information they received was often limited in comparison to that LAC received through the PEP process. This suggests that the DTs may benefit from the adoption of a structured, cumulative document such as the EPAC. This would enable information to be gathered in a logical structured format was clearly communicating to parents why the specific information is required.

The most effective DTs have a leadership role in promoting the educational achievement of every looked after and previously looked after child on the school’s roll (DfE, 2018a). Designated Teachers play a key role in promoting the educational achievement of each LAC and PLAC that they have on role. This includes working with the VSH, children’s social care, school staff and parents and carers any other relevant agency, to best understand and meet the needs of the children.

Pupil Premium was initially introduced for LAC to improve the attainment and close the attainment gap between this group and their peers. Following its successful implementation, Pupil Premium Plus was introduced to include PLAC. By committing to this extension, the DfE “acknowledged the enduring impact of trauma and loss in children’s lives and the key role of schools in supporting children who have had a

difficult start in life” (PAC-UK, 2016, p.2). Pupil Premium Plus is not designed solely to focus on the children’s attainment, instead, schools are able to support children ‘emotionally, socially and academically’, to ‘address their wider needs’ (PAC-UK, 2014).

Unlike the studies explored in the literature review, the DTs did not highlight any difficulties with retaining the money for their PLAC, instead, they expressed a degree of uncertainty about the best ways in which to utilise the funds. This may be related to them having sole responsibility for the money, unlike for LAC where the money is managed by the VSH. Therefore, the DTs may benefit from support to establish the best ways to utilise the money, to implement the necessary support for their PLAC.

In this study, the DTs explored the impact of therapeutic support for their children, however, it was not always clear whether they were referring to their LAC or PLAC. Much akin to the existing literature, there did not appear to be a consensus as to the role the school should play in implementing therapeutic support, with examples of school-led (internal) and parent-led (external) support discussed. It was interesting however, that when the provision of therapy was discussed, the DTs description of it being provided externally, appeared to be congruent with their belief that the traumas the child had experienced had not yet had a significant impact on the child life. This position appeared to contradict other statements made by the DTs, in respect of their understanding of the different ways in which children who had experienced trauma, could present.

Within this study there appeared to a sense of frustration at the structural barriers that impacted PLAC in accessing the appropriate support. They highlighted that some issues, such as transport arrangements, may not have proved a barrier for

less vulnerable children, however, there appeared to be an oversight in respect of how these barriers impact their PLAC. Indeed, as suggested by Pearce (2010), 'many traumatised looked after children have essential educational services withdrawn once an Adoption Order is granted' (p.3). The impression from the DTs in this study were that there was a lack of understanding from others about the support needed to address the children's needs. Further to this, the DTs lamented the barriers to addressing these, should and could be overcome. The DTs themselves however, appeared surprised at the level of support that the children needed, contrasting at times with their expressions of "just getting on with things". It is likely that the DTs feel so accustomed to making alterations to meeting their needs, that it appears surprising when others do not, or fail to appreciate the need to do so.

Children who have been adopted will have endured an interrupted experience of childhood (Dawson, 2021) and for most, this experience was so poor that that decision was taken to legally end the rights of their birth parents (Gore Langton & Boy, 2017). These experiences can result in the children being left with complex unmet needs, positioning them as some of the most vulnerable in society. Gore Langton and Boy implore adults to 'think toddler' when thinking about the mismatch between the chronological and developmental stages of development. The previous literature and this study suggest that DTs can find it challenging to understand the needs of the children, including differentiating between the impact of their early life experiences and more pervasive SEN needs

Since the introduction of school league-tables in 1992 (Reed & Hallgarten, 2003) there has been an ever-increasing focus on the academic outcomes for children. While at individual schools this has undoubtedly led to improvements in overall attainment levels, there is concern that such indicators "skew priorities to the extent

that other, normally less measurable goals are relegated or jettisoned” (pg.8). As schools are judged on their academic results, greater emphasis is typically placed on learning rather than meeting the emotional needs of children. Indeed, as Gore Langton and Boy (2017) offer, when dealing with traumatised children, headteachers often feel torn between attainment and nurture. Additionally, they explain that the teachers of adopted children face an almost impossible dilemma; prioritise learning goals or supporting children to feel safe enough to learn. These decisions are evident at a school-wide level, typically top-down, representing the ethos of the school.

5.4 Increasing Capacity

Designated Teachers are expected to play a key role in ensuring that LAC and PLAC have their personal, emotional and academic needs met. To do this, they need to be aware of the factors that may impact the children, both historically and currently, the development of which is typically developed through practical experience and attending training.

In their 2017 research ‘Perception of Care’, the charity Become found that only 24% of young people thought that teachers understood what being in care meant, with only 48% believing that teachers expected children in care to do well at school (Become, 2017). The researchers found that looked after children and young people had limited confidence in their teachers’ ability to understand their needs and respond accordingly. To gain an understanding of the situation from the perspective of teachers, in 2018 Become surveyed 447 teachers, the majority of whom had responsibility for the education of LAC, as a DT, SENDCO, part of the school senior leadership team or working in a VS. The study found that 87% of respondents had received no training about looked after children before they qualified as a teacher.

Further to this, the main themes highlighted that there was not enough training available for, or taken up by, teachers about children in care; schools and children's services did not work together closely enough; many teachers did not know enough about the care system and its impact on children; and some teachers expressed negative stereotypes about children in care (Become, 2018). Similar research was undertaken in respect of PLAC, with 65% of children reporting that they did not feel that their teachers fully understood how to support them. The researchers suggested that for PLAC to have an equal chance at school, gaps in understanding, empathy, resources and attainment would need to be addressed (Adoption UK, 2018).

The most recent DT guidance advises that DTs should have a minimum of two days per year to attend training specific to the needs of LAC (DfE, 2018a). Within the same guidance however, it is explained that due to their similar needs, 'it should be possible to include meeting the needs of these children as part of the same training' (p. 9). This highlights concerns raised both in the literature and in this study, that the additional time required to support both LAC and PLAC students is not sufficiently appreciated. In this study, all of the DTs highlighted their desire to engage in further training and development in their role, however, they expressed frustration at the challenges they faced in doing so. This was especially the case where they felt the nuances between LAC and PLAC support needs were not appreciated and therefore overlooked in their schools.

Studies exploring the SENDCO role (Crisp, Lewis & Robertson, 2006; Lewis & Ogilvie, 2002) highlight similar experiences of isolation I suppose experienced by the DTs in this study. SENDCOs through have been reported to have found support through SENDCO cluster meetings (Winward, 2012). In addition, alongside providing opportunities to engage in professional development and informal support; cluster

meetings provide an opportunity to develop a sense of professional belonging and identity (Jones, 2004).

The lack of communication between DTs was highlighted prior to the role becoming statutory and as well as this study, however this research highlights that this still remains the case. In 2012, in a small-scale study conducted by Ofsted (Ofsted, 2012), it was identified that unusually, most of LAs surveyed had regular forums for their DTs to meet and receive training, including needs identified at earlier forums. Some areas had established the delivery of training by experienced DTs for newly appointed DTs and in some areas, DTs were involved in training newly qualified teachers (NQTs), advising them on issues relating to LAC and on the role of the DT. Despite the positive appraisal, the examined literature and this study do not suggest that this is widespread practice. DT guidance (DfE, 2018a), suggests that DTs should be 'proactive' in building relationships with other professionals, in particular their local VSH and SEND department.

The DTs had limited contact with other DTs outside of their school settings and unlike the multi-agency approach experienced with supporting LAC, the differences in the role supporting PLAC meant that the feelings of isolation and invisibility increased. It appears significant that the DTs did not have a community of DTs to turn to. The importance of being able to learn from others was highlighted by all of the DTs in the study. This included informal discussions with their DT peers, as well as seeking guidance from their Head Teachers who themselves were knowledgeable of the DT role. For the DTs who were currently or previously SENDCOs, the experience of local SENDCO cluster meetings provided an example of a structured support system, one in which they had access to EPs and relevant external speakers, but more importantly, to their peer network.

It is likely that this comparison of roles heightened the sense of frustration with regards to the lived experience of the possibilities. The concept of the school cluster for supporting practice is not new; indeed Norwich et al. (1994) points out that that collaboration could enable schools to share practice and limited resources.

This level of support found within the SENDCo groups not evident in this study meaning that the DTs missed out on opportunities to work with and learn from one another. The potentially overlooks the importance of the DT providing both the technical support and empathy to their peers, which appears to be much needed in this isolated role. The DTs therefore, may benefit from the provision of a structured peer network, with the opportunity to access relevant training, engage with peers in a similar role and share practice. In the area in which the research was conducted, EPs are already responsible for facilitating SENDCo cluster groups, thus they hold the experience and frameworks for extending this provision to DTs.

Since the changes to the DT role came into force in 2018, arguably the duty has much wider implications for schools than simply bringing further responsibilities for one member of staff. Instead, it potentially affects areas such as policies, guidance, staff skills and knowledge, and the ethos of the overall school. The DTs therefore are expected to take the lead for developing staff knowledge and skills and developing the wider ethos of the school to support the children in their care.

One of the aspects of this responsibility is the development of staff. Due in part to a lack of both pre- and post-qualifying training in the needs of LAC and PLAC, it is likely that there are different starting points in relation to overall staff development. For professional development to be most effective, Cordingley (2015) suggests that the individual starting points, current beliefs and ineffective practices have to be

recognised. Goodall (2014) suggests that effective staff training addresses several different levels of need, personal, professional and organisational. The DTs in this study explored how this would operate at all three levels, including supporting individual staff to feel able to identify needs and the impact of trauma. At a professional level, this could support staff to feel better able to manage presenting behaviour in the classroom, whilst at an organisational level, this may represent a change in the general ethos of the school, such as reviewing behaviour and 'zero tolerance' policies.

The literature identified that a key part of changing school ethos or culture is an increased attention to the role of attachment and trauma in the lives of the pupils. Maslowski (2001) defined culture as "the basic assumptions, norms and values, and cultural artefacts that are shared by school members, which influence their functioning at school" (p. 8). In this study it was noted that Attachment Aware training was deemed likely to be beneficial to the wider school; however, this was still within the context of the DT themselves not necessarily feeling secure in their own understanding of attachment difficulties and how they may be playing out in the classroom. It appeared therefore as a learning opportunity for the wider school, not just for the DT to deliver to the staff, perhaps reinforcing its importance with regards to changing both perceptions and behaviour within the school. By committing to addressing this at a school-wide level the DTs in this study highlighted the importance of using such an approach to change the wider culture of the school.

5.5 Working Collaboratively

The DTs in this study appeared to both value and find the input of parents to be challenging. Many parents seek to reassure themselves by finding out what their child is entitled to and trying to ensure that this is being delivered by the school. It is

possible that any tension felt between the parent and DT is in part linked to feelings of anxiety of both sides; wanting to ensure that the school is aware of the child's needs and meeting the needs within the constraints of the school system.

For the adoptive parents in particular there are a multitude of support groups who may highlight provision available to the group members, however these may be provisions available at a local, or even school level, potentially heightening feelings of anxiety in the parents that it is not available to their child.

The DTs appeared to be in the unique position of wanting to engage parents, both to be supportive and to access available funds, while also trying to manage their expectations of what it is that the school and the DT can provide. The DTs explored the conflicting feelings when parents accessed incorrect information; being pleased that they were engaging with them, but feeling potentially blamed for the difficulty in accessing resources. The DT is likely learning new ways of engagement in their role that are different to dealing with corporate parents and perhaps more defined roles and responsibilities.

The DTs were aware that the parents and carers also found the relationship with the school difficult. Gore Langton and Boy (2017) highlighted that adoptive parents detailed their frustration at being treated like temporary foster carers, rather than permanent parents. The fear of parental judgement was also a key factor and barrier that adoptive parents faced (Dunstan, 2010).

The DTs appeared sensitive to the fact that the support needs of adoptive parents may differ from other parents, including the likelihood that they may feel blamed for behaviour that is linked to experiences before they were in their care. Approximately one fifth of children already school-aged at the time of their placement (DfE, 2015a)

and 69% of adoptive parents do not have children prior to adoption (Dance, 2015).

This means that the adoptive parents most recent experience of the education system may have been their own schooling, resulting in limited knowledge of current systems.

The DTs were aware of parent and guardian support groups linked to national charities and in the case of adopted parents specifically, provided by the EP service. There was, however, limited knowledge of what was available locally or whether or not their parents and guardians were aware of them. Only one DT was actively involved in supporting a group for adoptive parents at a school level, which appeared to allow the DT to be more efficient in their engagement; answering questions put forward by the group, instead of similar questions repeated by different parents.

In respect of PLAC, the DT guidance document impresses that the DT needs to understand the importance of involving parents and guardians in decision-making, as well as being a contact for parents and guardians. Studies surveying adoptive parents have found that the education system and engaging with school staff is a source of substantial difficulty for many adoptive parents (Dunstan 2010). Indeed, Dunstan highlighted parents' disappointment and frustration alongside the feeling that schools had a poor understanding of their children's needs and adoption itself.

Cooper and Johnson (2007) concluded that sharing of information, to ensure that issues which affect the child/young person who is adopted are fully understood, and open communication, which is strong and supportive between home and school, significantly contribute to the resilience of the child/young person who is adopted.

One of the DTs in this study actively sought out ways to engage parents, highlighting the success of the parent group in maintain in lines of communication. Within the

literature and in this study, parents were concerned about disclosing their child's status and how they would be helped in school. Prior to PLAC becoming a statutory responsibility for DTs and them being eligible for PP+; parents may have had little incentive for sharing such sensitive information or indeed understanding how their child would be supported in school.

The findings from this study suggest that most of the DTs found it difficult to conceptualise ways to establish and develop their relationships with parents and guardians. Positively however, one DT remarked that engaging in the research had encouraged them to think more about ways to proactively engage parents and promote the message that the school was accessible and supportive of care-experienced children and their families.

5.6 Summary

This chapter outlined the four superordinate themes identified through the analysis, as well as the links to existing literature and the findings from this study. Within this chapter, it was highlighted how DTs could benefit from working in conjunction with others in multi-agency teams and the impact on the DTs role. Further to this, the chapter explored the support the DTs put in place for children, the structural barriers they experienced and the ways in which some of these could be alleviated. In addition, the chapter explored the networking opportunities available to DTs and the ways in which they could be supported to develop these. Finally, the chapter explored the ways in which DTs could develop their understanding and practice in relation to working with parents and carers. The following chapter will provide a further presentation of the findings, suggestions for practice and explore the limitations of this study.

Chapter 6. Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

The aims of this chapter are to present the main conclusions from the research, discuss the potential limitations of the study and then consider how the findings can be put into recommendations for practice and future research in the area. Finally, the ways in which the study will be disseminated will be discussed.

6.2 Conclusions

The aim of this research was to gain a greater understanding of the experiences of Designated Teachers who are working with previously looked after children in primary school. Only one previous study explored the specific experiences of designated teachers in supporting looked after children (Goodall, 2014), therefore, the present study was undertaken due to the limited previous research and the relatively new role of the DT in supporting previously looked after children.

The role of the DT appears to a complex one, with challenges working across similar sounding needs such as trauma and attachment, with different partners, such as foster carers, adoptive parents, guardians, social workers and the VSH. It appears as if there are a number of key themes which have emerged from the interpretative analysis, including their feelings of isolation within the new elements of their role, especially when contrasted with the support they experience for when working with LAC. The DTs highlighted the importance of focusing on the child and developing a greater understanding of their needs, beyond perhaps the child's presentation. The DTs alluded to a desire to develop not only their own practice, but that of the staff around them, particularly in relation to understanding the impact of attachment and traumatic early experiences of the child; acknowledging the difficulties that may arise from the DT trying to change a culture within a school. Part of the change in culture for themselves as DTs was working with adoptive parents and guardians, who may

present with very different needs to those they encounter with foster parents, or indeed parents across the wider school, in the capacity of their additional responsibility.

The DTs had varying approaches to accessing the support they felt they needed, including being able to turn to headteachers within their provisions who were also experienced in the role of the DT. Having this support appeared in some way to offset some of the challenges they experienced in feeling overlooked by the VSH and the uncertainty that this created for them in fulfilling this expanded role. The DTs placed emphasis on the timing of the support, indicating that where it was delivered long into their role, they had needed to 'get on with it' but were uncertain as to the efficacy of their work without oversight.

The DTs were keen to develop their overall understanding of the children they worked with, using a range of methods to gather and make sense of the information about the children. They highlighted the challenges they faced in doing so, as well as the importance of persisting with this endeavour. The DTs indicated their frustration with the barriers they faced in supporting the children, highlighting that it was not always about their own knowledge of provision, but also structural challenges that they felt could and should be overcome.

The DTs placed great emphasis on the role of the parents and guardians in the overall support for the children. Highlighting the need and a keen desire to engage with the parents, whilst trying to manage realistic expectations in their interactions.

6.3 Limitations

This study should be considered within the context of a number of limitations

pertaining to the methodology, findings and interpretations. Limitations of IPA as an

overall methodical approach have been considered in the methodology chapter, therefore this section will outline how some of the limitations pertain to this study.

Within IPA, the researcher plays an active role through questioning and interpretation of the findings. While I would not have been possible to completely bracket my thoughts and preconceptions, I have attempted to be transparent by demonstrating how I reached my conclusions, considering alternatives throughout my analysis.

The sample size utilised within this study was fairly small. Notwithstanding the limited number of potential participants, there were difficulties external to this research which made recruiting a larger sample challenging. The results however are specific to the context within which the three DTs work, as such, although it is not the aim of IPA to provide data which can be generalisable to all contexts. The information about the DTs is provided to assist the reader in understanding how they may apply it to their own context.

The method of sampling should also be considered within this study. It may have been the case that DTs with a range of additional responsibilities were unable to participate, while DTs who were relatively new to the role may have felt that they lacked sufficient experience within the role to share.

6.4 Recommendations for Practice

Designated Teachers would likely benefit from peer support in a similar model to that employed with SENDCO cluster groups. The DTs need to keep up to date with a range of developments concerning both LAC and PLAC, on a local and national scale. Working together would enable the DTs to develop their own feelings of competence, through the sharing of examples of good practice, discussion of challenges. This system would also aid the shared development of a professional

identity; an identity distinct from any other roles the DTs hold within the school.

Experienced DTs could also play a role in supporting the development of newly appointed DTs, bridging the gap between their appointment and attendance at group training provided by the VSH. The groups could also be used to inform the content of future training sessions delivered by the VSH, or EPs, who themselves have experience of delivering group-based support for SENDCOs.

The DTs were curious about what happened for children beyond the primary phase and the long-term impact of their support. Understanding this may provide them with some context as to their own role and the ways in which they prepare for transitions both in and out of their schools.

A source of contention within the interviews was that of the role of the VSH. It may be useful for the DTs and therefore the parents, for them to have greater clarity as to the expectations of the VSH and how their roles both differ and complement each other within their changed relationship.

6.5 Recommendations for Future Research

The current research aimed to explore the experiences of DTs in supporting PLAC in primary schools. Despite the key role DTs play in schools supporting LAC and PLAC, there has been limited exploration of their views. This study has highlighted the importance of undertaking research gathering their views, enabling a more nuanced understanding of the role, its challenges and the support needs of the DTs. Using the knowledge gained from this study, further research may be undertaken to learn more about the role and, its development and the relationships between DTs and other agencies including the EPS, VSH, Children's Social Care and post-adoption services.

This study was undertaken within one District within a wider County. It would be interesting to note what the similarities and differences would be in the experiences of DTs both within the wider County, and other areas around the country. Different demographics in terms of the sizes of schools, the composition of the local population, rates of CAOs, SGOs and adoption; may give rise to key differences in the experiences of DTs in these localities.

The needs of PLAC are likely to change as they develop, therefore, their support needs and thus the role of the DT, is likely to change accordingly. This research focused entirely on the role of the DTs at a primary school level; it would be interesting to contrast this with the experience of DTs working at a secondary level. The research could explore the different types of needs of the children and young people, the types of support the DTs require to undertake their roles, the types of work the DT is expected to undertake and the range of professionals involved in working with children and young people in that age group.

At the time this research was conducted, the remit of DTs to work with previously looked after children was relatively new. Some DTs would have limited and in some cases, no experience at all of working with PLAC. By exploring this role at a later stage, it is possible that the DTs would have had the opportunity to gain more experience in working with PLAC, therefore being able to provide a greater insight into the intricacies of their role and the convergence and divergence within the task of supporting PLAC

As alluded to in the literature review chapter, there is a distinct lack of empirical research exploring the experiences of the parents and carers of PLAC. While there is a steadily growing body of research related to adoptive parents and their

experiences of the education system, the research exploring that of special guardians remains limited and indeed non-existent, in relation to carers of children with CAOs. By undertaking research in this area, agencies including the EPS, the VSH and Children's Social Care would have a greater understanding of the experiences and needs of parents and carers of children with CAOs and SGOs and the ways in which they can be best supported.

Looked after and previously looked after children have many similar, but not identical rights and support structures within education. As such, further research could be undertaken to examine a direct comparison of the experience of supporting LAC and PLAC within educational settings, from the perspective of teachers, students, parents and guardians, and other professionals who routinely support both cohorts of children and young people.

A final area of additional research may be to explore the role of the VSHs, with the aim of understanding their experiences of their expanded role and the ways in which they work with DTs and parents and guardians of PLAC.

6.6 Dissemination

The research will be disseminated through a presentation to the educational psychology team in the local authority where the research took place. Further to this, a summary of the findings will be made available to the participants and the local VSH.

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Appendix 1 Types of Attachment

Type of attachment	Characteristics
Secure	The child has a sense of confidence that their caregiver will be responsive when needed in times of stress, enabling the child to develop a positive sense of self and the feeling of safety to enable them to explore. This type of attachment will form the template from which other relationships are based. Most children have a secure attachment type.
Insecure avoidant	This type of attachment is formed when the caregiver is unavailable or rejecting. The child becomes aware of the need to meet their needs themselves and may avoid emotional connection with others, appearing to be self-reliant and at times, distant.
Insecure anxious/ambivalent	This type of attachment is formed when the caregiver is inconsistent or intrusive, meaning that the child may not know what to expect, increasing the child's anxiety. The child may appear to be distressed at the withdrawal of the caregiver, however they may appear pre-occupied or ambivalent in relation to their return.
Disorganised	This type of attachment is formed when the child's need for emotional closeness is ignored or the behaviour of the caregiver is erratic or unpredictable. The child may find it difficult to read the emotions of others and may become upset if they sense withdrawal from them. The child is likely to seek proximity and as well as be avoidant of others.

Appendix 2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria and Search Terms Used for Search Two

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Rationale
Published in the English language	Studies published in languages other than English	Time constraints do not allow for the translation of articles
Published in England or Wales	Published outside of England and Wales	There are differences in policies ,legislation and educational provision in countries outside of England and Wales
Focuses on participants who have the designated responsibility within their school for care-experienced children	Focuses on participants without the designated responsibility within their school for care-experienced children	Need to focus specifically on the experiences of those with designated responsibility for LAC and/or PLAC children
Published between 2009-2021	Published before 2009	Legislative changes made in 2009 made the DT role statutory

Source	Search Terms 1	Search Terms 2
EBSCO Host	Explor* OR Experienc* OR Perce* OR Opinion OR Reflect* OR Belie* OR Attitude*	“designated teacher” OR “designated teachers”
EThOS	“Designated Teacher”	

Appendix 3 Interview Schedule

1. Can you tell me about your experience of supporting PLAC?
2. What do you see as the impact of the changes to the DT role?
3. Can you tell me about your experience of accessing support in your role?
4. What additional support do you feel you need in your role?
5. Can you tell me about your experience of working with the parents and carers of PLAC?
6. What support needs have you encountered in respect of PLAC?
7. Can you tell me about your experiences of supporting staff to work with PLAC?
8. What are the challenges you have found working with PLAC?
9. What are the positives you have found working with PLAC?
10. What additional changes do you feel should be made to the role?
11. Is there anything else that you would like to add about your experiences?

Examples of prompts used

Can you tell me more...

What did you think about that...

How did that make you feel...

What did you think about that...

What does that mean for PLAC...

Appendix 4 Participant Information Sheet



Participant Information Sheet

Introduction

As part of my doctoral training at Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust I am undertaking a research project focusing on the views of Designated Teachers working with children who were previously looked after. The title of this research project is:

Exploring Designated Teachers' experiences of working with previously looked after children.

I would like to invite you to take part in this research project. Before you decide whether you would like to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take some time to read the following information. If you have any additional questions or would like to discuss the research in more detail, do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Purpose of the research project

The aim of this research is to gain a more in-depth understanding of what it is like to be a Designated Teacher supporting previously looked after children in school. This will be done by exploring your experiences, thoughts and feelings about your work. In doing this, I believe that other professionals can gain an increased understanding of the role of the Designated Teacher and an insight into how it can be supported and strengthened to promote successful outcomes for previously looked after children. This will be of particular use to Educational Psychologists who provide support and guidance, not only to previously looked after children and young people, but also to those who support them.

You have been asked to participate in this research project as you meet the criteria for the sample population. I am hoping to speak to several Designated Teachers working in primary schools. To ensure that I select participants who are able to share their experiences of working with previously looked after children, the following criteria will be used when selecting participants:

- Participants hold the title of Designated Teacher for Looked After and Previously Looked After Children or have recognised responsibility for supporting and monitoring the outcomes of looked after and previously looked after children within the school.
- Participants have at least six months experience in the role
- Participants have at least one previously looked after child on role at their school

Unfortunately, I'm only able to speak to a limited number of people and so priority will be given to those who express an interest first.

It is up to you to decide if you would like to take part in this research project. To help you make an informed decision, I have outlined below the process in more detail. It is important at this point for me to indicate that even if you decide to take part and sign the consent form, that you can still withdraw at any time until the data has been collected and anonymised, without giving a reason.

Research Outline

If you do decide to take part, I will contact you to arrange a convenient time and date for a one-off individual interview to take place. It is anticipated that the interview would take place in your school if this is the most comfortable and convenient location for you, otherwise an

office space can be arranged. The interview should last roughly one hour. The interview will be semi-structured which means that I will ask some questions based on your experiences of working with previously looked after children, but you will be able to talk in-depth about what you think is relevant and important. You will only be expected to discuss information which you feel comfortable talking about.

Additional Information

Interview data will be anonymised, in order to protect participants identities. It should be noted however, that due to the small sample size there are distinct limitations in the level of anonymity that can be afforded, however, pseudonyms will be used to protect participant identity as much as possible.

The interviews will be audio recorded to aid with analysis. These recordings will not be used for any other purpose without your written permission. All the data, both audio and written, will be held and analysed by myself. The data will be preserved for 10 years, as per the Research Councils UK guidance.

All the information collected during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Your name or where you work will not be used in any reports or publications, instead each participant will be given a unique number by which they will be referred to. Only anonymised information will be shared with others. The interviews are confidential, however, any disclosures of imminent harm to self and/or others, will be dealt with in line with established local safeguarding procedures.

The findings of this research project will be written up in a thesis as part of my Doctorate in Educational Psychology course, which will be completed in July 2020. They may also be published in a paper or publication. A summary of the results will also be fed back to colleagues working in the local authority, including the educational psychology team and virtual school, to aid with understanding and action planning. At your request, you will also be provided with a copy of the findings.

This project has been ethically approved by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust ethics review board. If you have any concerns regarding any aspects of the research process you can contact me directly. Additionally, if you have any concerns or would like to make a formal complaint at any point, you can contact Simon Carrington, Head of Academic Governance and Quality Assurance (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk) or my research supervisor (please see below for contact details).

For any further details regarding the research project or to express an interest in taking part please contact:

Jade Harris
Trainee Educational Psychologist
JHarris@Tavi-Port.nhs.uk

Dr Richard Lewis
Research Supervisor
RLewis@Tavi-Port.nhs.uk

Appendix 5 Consent Form

Consent Form

Title of Project: Exploring Designated Teachers' Experiences of Working with Children Previously Looked After	
Name of Researcher: Jade Harris	
Participant Identification Number for this research project:	Please tick
1. I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information sheet for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The researcher has made it clear that the small sample size will be considered when making adjustments to identifiable data. I understand that my interview data will be anonymised using a pseudonym in order to protect my identity as much as possible.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded and that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I understand that all the information collected during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. My name and where I work will not be used in any reports or publications, instead I will be referred to by a unique participant identification number.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I understand that although the interviews are confidential, any disclosures of imminent harm to self and/or others, will be dealt with in line with established local safeguarding procedures.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I understand that the findings will be used as part of the researchers' doctoral thesis. They may also be used in a paper or other publication. A summary of the results will be shared with relevant teams in the Local Authority and can be provided to participants at their request.	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I agree to take part in the above research project.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

Once this has been signed by all parties, this form will be placed in the project's main record, which is stored securely.

Jade Harris
Trainee Educational Psychologist
JHarris@Tavi-Port.nhs.uk

Dr Richard Lewis
Research Supervisor
RLewis@Tavi-Port.nhs.uk

Appendix 6 List of Emergent Themes for Each DT

DT One Emergent Themes
Accessing support
Assessing experiences
Attachment awareness ethos
Challenges of different systems
Early experiences
Feeling overlooked
Gathering information from parents
Impact of training on role
Knowledge of role
Parental choice
Parental group support
Parental support
Proactive parents
Reaching parents
Responding to need
Role development
Role of external agencies
Sensitivity towards parents
Stages of development
The role of other support
Therapeutic support
Uncertainties of support

DT Two Emergent Themes
A drop in support
Accessing support
Budget constraints
Building relationships
Challenging perceptions
Children as individuals
Comparing systems
Compulsory training
Consistent support
Different types of needs
Engagement with others
External support
Informal support
Limited involvement
Limited knowledge
Limited understanding of support
Open to discussion
Parental knowledge
Parents understanding of needs
Practical support
Prioritising support
Promoting support
Provision of support
Range of needs
Reaching out
Relevance of policies
Relevant training
Sharing information with parents
Sources of support
Specific training
Time constraints
Timing of support
Training priorities
Understanding concerns
Understanding of the role

DT Three Emergent Themes
Accessing support
Assessing training
Barriers to accessing training
Developing practise
Different local authority procedures
Different priorities to staff
Engaging with others
External support
Increasing sense of belonging
Informal support
Journey of development
Limited knowledge of role
Limited support
Managing support
Minimal information
Providing support to families
Relationships between parents
Sharing information with families
Sources of information
Supporting parents together
Supporting staff understanding
Types of support
Understanding attachment
Understanding needs
Understanding processes
Understanding the role
Valuing support

Appendix 7 Emergent Comments DT One

Key: Black = Descriptive Comments Blue = Linguistic Comments Red = Conceptual Comments

57	Now I'm of the understanding that they're not obliged to do that,	Not obliged- barriers to information sharing
58	I don't know if that's right but yeah, so we could have children that	
59	we don't even know who are, but I'm pretty certain that the ones	
60	that we do have are the only ones we've got but that might not be	Acknowledgement of uncertainty
61	the case.	
62	<i>So thinking about when a child does arrive at school, and I know</i>	
63	<i>for current students, and where parents have sort of informed</i>	
64	<i>you. How are new parents notified, how are they told what's</i>	
65	<i>available</i>	
66	Okay so the young, the mother of the child in reception has been	The knowledge of the parent viewed positively
67	very productive, so she arranged a meeting with me, in the last	
68	summer. And we talked about what she was entitled to. And she	Entitled
69	was very knowledgeable anyway, actually. But obviously because	
70	they're entitled to erm a school uniform from us. And so, I made	Financial implications
71	her aware of that. And obviously clubs. So, not, not, I don't know,	
72	so we were talking to the head teacher about this other day and	Tensions with approaches?
73	erm obviously some of these families are probably quite affluent,	
74	erm so if they don't need to have any sort of financial support it	Proactiveness
75	would be sort of nicer if they, they didn't take us up on it, but	
76	certainly they do get that free school uniform. So, but yeah she	
77	was very proactive in approaching me and having a meeting with	
78	me.	
79	<i>Okay. And what about parents who you are made aware,</i>	
80	<i>somehow as you said "by osmosis" that a child is adopted. How</i>	
81	<i>is that support then put forward.</i>	
82	I've kind of erm informally approached them, because, you know,	Types of parental approach
83	you need to be sensitive to erm, to what they've what gone	Sensitivity to experiences
84	through and, you know, what they've done for the child. So I've	
85	said, you know, if you'd like to meet with me and talk about what	
86	we can offer your child. And we've gone through it that way. So it's	
87	kind of like an informal, but now that they've got the erm... So	
88	what they do now actually, now that they've got their group, kind	
89	of the chairperson will often email me asking me, you know,	

Appendix 8 Example of Emergent Themes for DT One

Key: Black = Descriptive Comments Blue = Linguistic Comments Red = Conceptual Comments

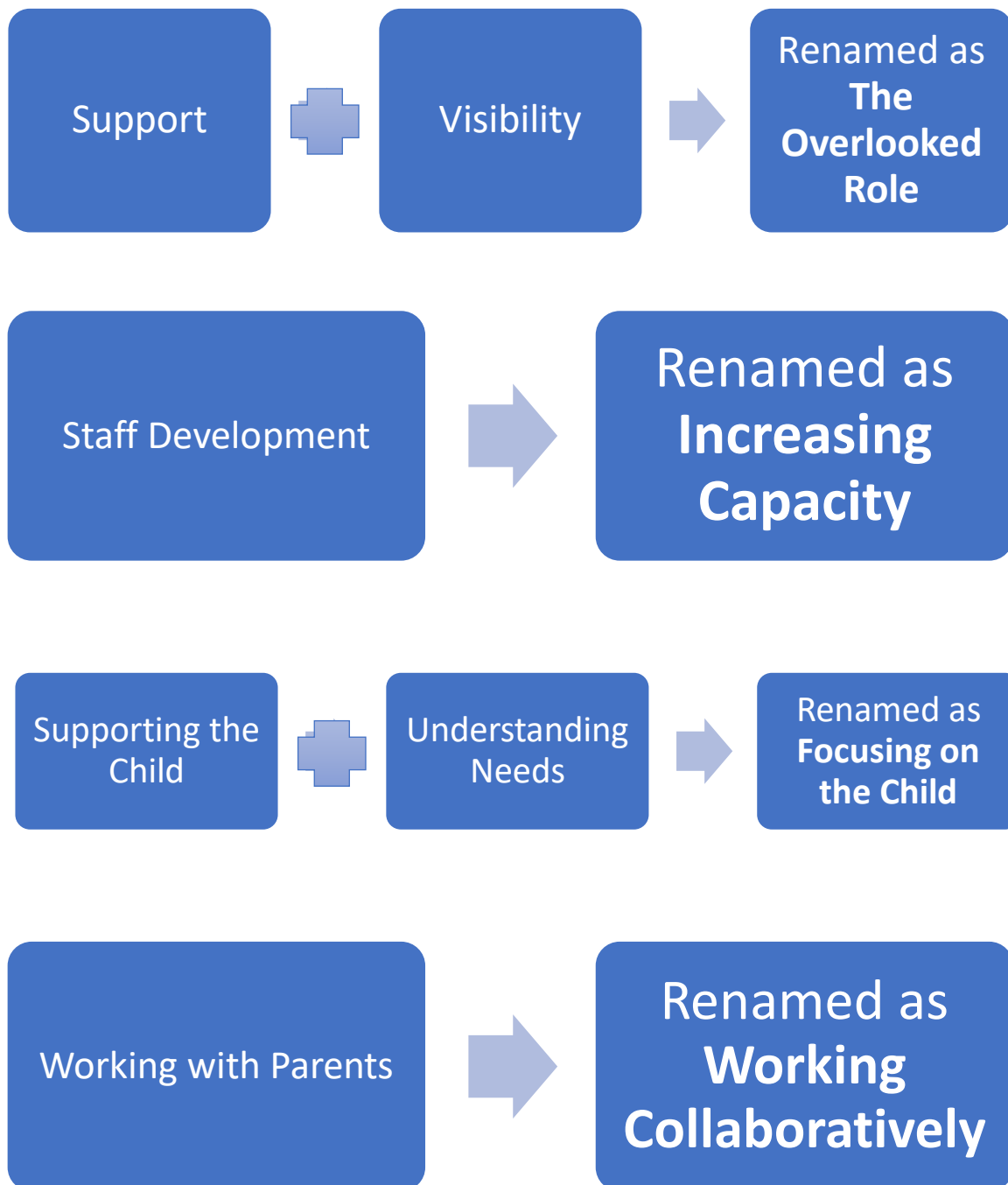
Emergent themes are in the left-hand column

Accessing support	24	<i>Okay so following on from that, tell me more about your experience of support from the Virtual School in terms of previously looked after children.</i>	
	25		
	26		
	27	Erm, I think since going on the designated teacher training, I think	
	28	if there was, if there were any concerns or challenges I think we	Falls to the school
	29	could contact them, but they're not necessarily erm in touch with	Support from others stops
	30	us in the same way that they would be if we had a looked after,	"we could"- uncertainty?
	31	child.	
	32	<i>Okay. So, in terms of thinking about the changes to the designated teacher role, what has that been like?</i>	
	33		
Knowledge of role	34	What do you mean the changes.	
	35	<i>So, from 2018, previously looked after children fall under the designated teacher role as well. So just thinking about the impact of that.</i>	
	36		
	37		
	38	Oh okay I didn't realise that was new I thought that had always	
	39	been the case. Erm I think it's a good thing, because obviously, it	Knowledge of statutory changes
	40	makes sure that we, that the designated teacher, ensures that	
	41	they get what they're entitled to, in terms of... in terms of	Entitled to
	42	interventions that they might need which would be funded then	
	43	through the pupil premium but yeah no I think it's a good idea, and	
Parental group support	44	also we have, erm, the parents have through contact with us, set	
	45	up a support group for each other. And we sort of, we facilitate	Supporting parents together
	46	that to some extent and so that's been really good. So for the	Facilitate- key role?
	47	parents, knowing that there is a designated teacher I think it's	
	48	been really good for them because otherwise they might not have	
	49	known who to approach. It's just a kind of, you know, can't think	Recognition of their key role in supporting
	50	of the word, it's seamless I guess.	parents
	51	<i>Okay. So tell me more about how you work with parents of previously looked after children.</i>	
	52		
	Reaching Parents	53	So, to find out about them, it's, some of whom you sort of found
54		out, just through osmosis really, just kind of have "Oh, I didn't	Osmosis- coincidental, unstructured,
55		know that". But that was before I had this role, erm, but it's the	unsystematic
56		parents have told us that they've been previously looked after.	Not openly shared. Are the statuses a secret?

Appendix 9 Initial Six Superordinate Themes and Related Subordinate Themes

Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessing external support (later became role development) • Informal helping hands (later became role development) • Experiencing a drop of support (later combined with feeling forgotten) • Practicalities (later combined with inconsistencies)
Staff development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing the wider school • Developing competence (later became role development) • Staff knowledge (later combined with developing the wider school) • Managing teacher expectations (later combined with developing the wider school)
Supporting the child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Piecing things together • Being the main source of support (later combined with managing need) • Managing need
Understanding needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the child (later combined with piecing things together) • Seeing past the label • Task at hand (later combined with managing need) • Sharing information (later combined with piecing things together) • Sharing the load (later combined with managing need)
DT Visibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling forgotten • Conflicting priorities • Inconsistencies • Feeling isolated (later combined with feeling forgotten)
Working with parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging parents • Building relationships (later combined with engaging parents) • Managing parental expectations (later changed to parental expectations)

Appendix 9 continued



Appendix 10 Ethical Approval

The Tavistock and Portman 
NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement
Directorate of Education & Training
Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 8938 2699
<https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/>

Jade Harris

By Email

31 July 2019

Dear Jade,

Re: Trust Research Ethics Application

Title: An Interpretive Phenomenological Study Exploring Designated Teachers' Experiences of Working with Children Previously Looked After

Thank you for submitting your updated Research Ethics documentation. I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

Please be advised that any changes to the project design including changes to methodology/data collection etc, must be referred to TREC as failure to do so, may result in a report of academic and/or research misconduct.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Best regards,



Paru Jeram
Secretary to the Trust Research Degrees Subcommittee
T: 020 938 2699
E: academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk

cc. Course Lead, Supervisor, Research Lead

Appendix 11 Participant Debrief

Study Debrief

Title of study: Exploring Designated Teachers' experiences of working with previously looked after children.

Name of researcher: Jade Harris

Thank you for taking part in the study.

The aim of this research is to gain a more in-depth understanding of what it is like to be a Designated Teacher (DT) supporting previously looked after children in school.

Why is this topic important?

From 1st September 2018, governors of maintained schools and proprietors of academies 'must designate a member of staff to have responsibility for promoting the educational achievement of looked after children and those who are no longer looked after because they are the subject of an adoption, special guardianship order, child arrangements order, or were adopted from state care outside of England and Wales'. A key role for the DT is to promote high expectations of looked after and previously looked after children, to the children themselves, as well as the adults around them.

There is very little published literature exploring the experiences of DTs in supporting looked after children and even less in relation to previously looked after children. Supporting DTs to explore their experiences is likely to reveal nuances of the role that are far beyond the scope of a policy document.

The role of the DT extends beyond the school, into multi-agency working with others such as Virtual School Heads (VSH), Educational Psychologists (EPs), Children's Social Care and the Emotional Wellbeing & Mental Health Service (EWMHS). To gain a better understanding of how these different, yet complementary services work together, it is important to first understand the unique experiences of the individuals within these roles. By developing this understanding, a more cooperative and holistic approach can be taken to supporting both individual children and the systems within which they exist. Furthermore, by increasing understanding of the experience of DTs, EPs will be better positioned to offer such support, guidance and training.

How was this explored?

In this study, you were asked to discuss your experience of being a Designated Teacher supporting previously looked after children. The interview was semi-structured, which meant that although you were asked some questions based on your experiences of working with previously looked after children, you were also given the opportunity to talk in-depth about what you thought was relevant and important.

What happens now?

You do not need to do anything. The interviews will be transcribed, anonymised and analysed, before being published as part of the researchers' Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology thesis. The research may also be published in relevant journals and publications.