The educational experiences of looked after children: the views of young people in two London boroughs.

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I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is my own.

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Abstract

Research has consistently reported on the inadequate educational experiences and attainment of looked after children (DfE, 2013), with many authors drawing associations between academic performance and educational and life outcomes. Much of the research relating to looked after children and education is exclusively concerned with schooling up to 16. Few studies have explored the views and educational experiences of young people post compulsory education. In relation to education previous research has highlighted the importance of relationships, high expectations, support, encouragement and stability of care.

This current thesis adopted a participatory approach (Shier, 2001, Holland, Renold, Ross and Hillman, 2010), which highlighted the value of seeking the views and gaining an insight into the experiences of young people, at the end of care and care leavers. Ten young people between the ages of 16-24 were interviewed using semi structured interviews. The findings of the study largely reflect the current literature, with the following main themes identified: Personal characteristics, responses to life events, supportive contexts, and negotiating challenging systems. Implications for educational psychologists, wider service delivery and research implications are reported.

Contents

1.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the current research, exploring the views and educational experiences of young people between the ages of 16-24, from a care background. This current thesis adopts a participatory approach (Shier, 2001; Holland, Renold, Ross and Hillman, 2010; Bergold and Thomas, 2012; Bergold, 2007; Pant, 2012), which highlights the value of seeking the views and gaining an insight into the experiences of young people at the end of care and care leavers and in turn through this involvement effect future policy and practice. It seeks to identify the educational experiences and educational pathways of these young people in two London boroughs and will examine the factors that may contribute towards or hinder their educational success. With the introduction of new special educational needs and disabilities legislation and-guidance, extending the role of the Educational Psychologist (EP) to work with young people up to the age of 25 (DFE/DH, 2013); this research is particularly relevant to their role and key to determining new areas of work development with this population in the future.

The chapter begins by exploring the nature and make up of looked after children (LAC) and young people in England, the reasons for entering the care system, their educational prospects and life outcomes. The relevance of such research for EPs is explored; the local contexts in which the study takes place and the key focus of the study will be addressed.

1.1   Who are looked after children and young people?

The term 'looked after' was introduced by the Department of Health (DH) (1989) to refer to children in public care; these included those in foster care or residential placements, in addition to those residing with their parents but also holding a care order (Richardson-and Lelliot, 2003). A care order is a court order made under section 31 of the 1989 Children Act, which places a child compulsorily in the care of a designated local authority (LA). The court may only make a care order if it is satisfied that the child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm attributable to the care given or likely to be given to the child, or the child being beyond parental control. The LA assumes parental responsibility, shared with the parents of the child. Children can also come into the care of a LA by a voluntary agreement. Parental responsibility remains with the parents or primary carer and parents may remove their children from such accommodation at any time (DH, 1989).

Children enter care for various reasons. In 2013, 62% of the care population were reported as coming into care because of abuse or neglect; others were due to family "dysfunction" or "acute stress", absent parenting, parental illness or disability, or "socially unacceptable behaviour". 3% were looked after due to their own disability and approximately 6% were unaccompanied asylum seekers (DfE, 2013).

1.2 National context

According to recent figures published by the Department for Education (DfE)(2013), there were approximately 68,000 LAC in England, a 2% increase on the previous year and an increase of 12% compared to 2009 (DfE, 2013). 33,000 of these children were reported to be of school age and of these, 28% had a statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN). Statistics have shown that the number of children in care has steadily increased each year and is now at its highest point since 1985. With a continuing increase in the numbers of children entering the care system, it is ever more important that the ongoing issues of poor outcomes and inadequate educational experiences and attainments (Harker, Dobel-Ober, Berridge, and Sinclair, 2004) be addressed.

Research in this area is a fairly recent concern, having been neglected both in terms of legislative development and research (Connelly and Chakrabarti, 2008), with the Department Education and Employment and the Department of Health issuing the first joint guidance on the education of children and young people in care in 2000 and the Children Act (2004) being the first legislative document to stress the need for LA's to promote a LAC's educational achievement. The importance of education, high expectations, early intervention, stability and the value of listening to children and young people in care was emphasised in the legislation; the need to listen to the views and experiences of children and young people in care was further highlighted in the Children and Young Person's Act (2008).

Ensuring that children and young people looked after achieve positive educational outcomes is a key focus of the Government's widening participation agenda, which seeks to increase the number of pupils from underrepresented groups in further and higher education for the purposes of social justice and economic competitiveness (Gorham, 2009). LA's are now expected to establish and monitor data, with a view to ascertaining ways to improve the educational attainments of LAC through Personal Educational Plans (PEPs). The purpose of

this is to develop a strategic plan that will support and encourage each child to reach their educational and life potential (Firth and Fletcher, 2001).

1.3   Educational outcomes of looked after children and young people

The educational underachievement of LAC is well documented; research has found that children and young people in care perform significantly below that of their peers. In a large scale quantitative study conducted by the DfE (2013) only 15% of LAC achieved five or more A* to C at GSCE compared with 58% of all children. Furthermore, over half of LAC-were found to leave school with no qualifications. Berridge (2007) suggests that these findings be understood within the context of the high numbers of LAC with statements of SEN; although he notes that these SEN may be a consequence of being in care.

Children and young people in care are found to be under-represented in post compulsory education. Jackson, Ajayi and Quigley (2003) noted that compared with 38% of the wider population, only 1% of care leavers progressed to university. Moreover, quantitative research carried out by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) (2003) reported that 86% of all 19 year olds were in education, employment and training, compared with 46% of care leavers aged 19. While studies have noted that these poor educational outcomes have been attributed to negative pre-care experiences (Berridge and Brodie, 1998), evidence suggests that they may also be owing to experiences within the care system. For example, Winter (2006) suggests that the educational outcomes of LAC remains poor, when pre-care factors are controlled for.

Research suggests that care leavers are over-represented among disadvantaged groups, despite accounting for less than 1% of their age group (Evans, 2003). For example, the SEU (2003) reported that a quarter of adults in prison and between a quarter and a third of homeless people had experience in care; LAC are seven times more likely to abuse alcohol or drugs and four times more likely to require support from mental health services (Jackson & Simon, 2006). Whilst the outcomes for children and young people in care appear discouraging, Rutter (1985) suggests that it is possible to alter their life outcomes, highlighting the role of education in transforming their lives, both in terms of providing opportunities and in removing them from social disadvantage.

1.4   Importance of young people's views

In 1991, the UK ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; respect for the views of children and young people was a key principle. Consequently, children are now entitled to contribute to decisions made by adults (which may affect them). The importance of listening to the views of children has been addressed in the Every Child Matters and Care Matters agenda and has been statutory since the Children Acts of 1989/2004. While PEPs are required to incorporate the views of LAC and reports have suggested that they help to provide a forum for social work and education professionals to meet in the interests of children (Hayden, 2005), few children seem to be aware of them (Dobel-Ober, Brodie, Kent, Berridge and Sinclair, 2006). Consequently, researchers and organisations request more direct views and detailed accounts of the experiences of children and young people from a care background. Gersch (1996) argues that there is a moral obligation to explore the views of children and young people and where appropriate that these views be included in policy and practice (Humphreys, Berridge, Butler, & Ruccick, 2003).

The prevalence of a needs-based discourse within the research of LAC tends to view these children as recipients of services, to ameliorate current difficulties and improve their long-term outcomes (Winter, 2006). However, such an approach does not allow for their participation rights to be sufficiently addressed; the need to broaden the research agenda is therefore essential in re-identifying children and young people looked after as skilled and active within social processes. It is possible to achieve this in situations where children and young people looked after are viewed as participants of research, rather than objects of research (Winter, 2006).

Considering these points this current thesis intends to promote the participation of LAC in the development of the study. The study aims to take into account the views and experiences of young people so that they will help to shape the recommendations of this current thesis (Holland, Renold, Ross and Hillman, 2010). For example, young people in this thesis were consulted during a 'drop in' session, During these sessions the researcher was able to observe the interactions between the young people and engage with the young people themselves on an informal level, in an everyday situation - this contributed towards the shaping of the study's design in the early stages; it allowed the participants to orientate the researcher to key topics, based on their life experiences, for the interviews and encouraged, to some extent, participants to direct the course of their interviews, within the overall themes of the research (this is discussed in more detail in the methodology).

One of the first attempts to highlight the issue of child's participation originates from Hart, with his 'ladder of children's participation' (1992). Hart's ladder distinguishes possible types of adult–child interaction represented in participatory practice. The model is comprised of eight rungs and according to Hart, what the model offers is simplicity of form and clarity of goals that enable a wide range of professional groups and institutions to rethink ways of engaging with children. Shier (2001) suggests that one of the most useful contributions is the identification of the lowest ladder rungs of non-participation, as this has led to significant improvements in practice.

Hart's model has led to the emergence of further models such as Shier's (2001) Pathway to Participation. Shier (2001) suggests that this model serves as an additional tool or extension of Hart's ladder rather than an entirely new framework of children's participation. The model is comprised of five rungs, level 3 - *children's views are taken into account* - represents the minimum requirements laid out in the UN Convention and reflects the participatory involvement of young people in this current thesis. For example, young people in this thesis were provided with a 'safe space' to voice their views and opinions in the confidence that their views would be valued and would contribute towards the recommendations laid out in this thesis. Young people in this current thesis were able to participate to the extent that they were able, to some degree, to direct the course of their interviews, within the overall themes. Holland et al, (2010) suggests that participatory research can be useful, particularly when working with vulnerable groups such as LAC, as they are often subject to "fixed categorization with categories such as 'self-care' and 'identity' discussed at events such as review meetings and care proceedings"(P364). Participatory research, they suggest can therefore be helpful in exploring other aspects of their lives. The participatory element of this current thesis was therefore to encourage young people to talk freely about their views and experiences and take a lead in deciding which aspects of their lives they wished to explore, whilst also keeping within the overall themes.

Typologies such as Hart's ladder (1992) and Shier's step-wise progression (2001), have been significant in challenging policy and practice, as they have been powerful tools to highlight the lack of children's participation and to advocate for change (Smith and Thomas, 2010).

More recently, authors have recognised the value of seeking the views and experiences of children and young people in care, to provide a greater and richer understanding and appreciation of their needs (Martin and Jackson, 2002), yet, few studies have sought to achieve this (Goddard, 2000). Some authors have suggested that this is due to professionals

having to maintain a balance between ensuring the safety and protection of children and young people, whilst also enabling them to make decisions (Munro, 2001). Others have emphasised the additional struggle and difficulty in gaining access to LAC, for the purpose of research (Murray, 2005).

1.5 Importance of this research for the profession of Educational Psychology

There is a greater proportion of children with SEN amongst LAC than other children and would therefore benefit from the involvement of an EP (DH, 1998). Studies have found that outcomes for LAC are improved in cases where an EP has been involved (Sinclair, Wilson and Gibbs, 2005) and carers were found to rate educational psychology as the most valuable form of support in looking after the child; this was particularly true in cases where carers felt they had been fully involved. However, Evans (2003) argues that many EP services are organised in a way that significantly reduces their usefulness in supporting LAC as there is an increased likelihood (as EPs are attached to schools and do not have an individual caseload) that they may lose track of a child who changes school, owing to frequent placement breakdown (Evans, 2000). Nevertheless, qualitative research highlights the significant contribution that EPs make to the education and welfare of LAC, these include: support for teachers, carers, children and young people (Dent and Cameron, 2003); facilitating multi-agency working and delivering training (Bradbury, 2006).

The usefulness of this research for EPs is further supported by the recent Children and Families Bill (2013), which dictates that EPs are to work with young people up to the age of 25. This change will require EPs to reflect on aspects of their role and embrace an understanding of the psychological concerns of 16 to 25 year olds. As this current thesis explores the views and experiences of young people up to 25, it is relevant to the profession of EPs and will provide a deeper understanding of the needs of this population and the ways of working with them.

1.6 Local context

The study was carried out in two small, densely populated, inner London Boroughs. The research was carried out between March 2010 and June 2013. Data were collected over an

extended period of time in both LA's. Both are boroughs of stark contrast with areas of affluence neighbouring areas of high deprivation. In 2011, more than 300 children were looked after in Borough 1, most of who were from white ethnic backgrounds. More than 150 children were looked after in Borough 2 and were disproportionately from black minority ethnic groups. A large proportion of both groups of LAC were unaccompanied asylum seeking children (Ofsted, 2011). There are more than 300 care leavers in borough 1; two thirds of whom are aged between 18 and 21 years, the other third are aged over 21. In Borough 2 there are more than 200 care leavers aged between 16 and 23 (Ofsted 2011).

Educational attainment in both Boroughs is better overall than the national average at key stage 2, 3 and 4; although Borough 1 underperforms compared to the London average. Local attainment figures for LAC in secondary schools show that significantly fewer LAC, than their peers, reach expected levels. In 2011, Borough 1 reported that at Key Stage 4, 8% of LAC in the borough achieved 5 + GCSEs A*-C and 14% of LAC in borough 2 compared with 13% of LAC nationally and 62% of all children nationally (DfE, 2012).

For five GCSE's A*-G, LAC in borough 1 did considerably better than LAC nationally (43%), but underperformed when compared with all children in the borough, who performed very similarly to all children nationally (92%). In Borough 2, 67% of LAC achieved 5+ A*-G compared with 43% of LAC nationally, but underperformed when compared with all children in the borough (96%) and all children nationally (92%).

While fewer care leavers in borough 1 were in education, employment and training than care leavers nationally (58%); more were in suitable accommodation than care leavers nationally (88%). A greater number of care leavers in borough 2 were in education, employment and training than care leavers nationally (58%); the same percentage (88%) were in suitable accommodation as care leavers nationally (DfE, 2014)

There are a higher proportion of children with SEN in Borough 1 compared with London, a significant proportion have a statement of special needs. In Borough 2 the proportion of children with SEN is lower than England as a whole; the vast majority of children with SEN are met at school action and school action plus, fewer children and young people have statements (DfE, 2014).

1.7 Aim of the research

This current thesis will explore the educational experiences of young people from a care background between the ages of 16-24, at the end of care and care leavers. The purpose of this current thesis is to identify the factors within the care and education system that contribute to the educational success or hindrance of this group, with a view to inform future service delivery within both boroughs. A key aim of the study is to empower them, through the exploration and appreciation of their views and personal experiences. As previously noted, there is a need for research to enable children and young people looked after to voice their views, hence the questions in the interview schedule will be broad. Topics to be explored include: Care history (including number of home and school moves), attitude and motivation towards learning pre- and during care, expectations of oneself and others expectations with regards to school learning, what helped/hindered learning and school experiences, significant adults, the impact of school and educational experiences on moving to independence and further education and ways to improve things for young people in care. Thematic analysis will be used to identify themes within the data.

The current proposal highlights the importance of participatory research (Shier, 2001; Holland et al, 2010); young people in this current thesis will be able to participate to the extent of having a full understanding of the study and its process and knowing that their opinions will be taken seriously. Moreover, young people will have an opportunity to contribute towards the designing of the interview schedule - the appropriateness of the questions, delivery and use of language.

1.8 Rationale for the study

This current thesis was negotiated between the researcher (a trainee educational psychologist in borough 1) and professionals within the LA of Borough 1. Initially the PEP and the Head of the SEN Team in Borough 1 suggested that a greater understanding of the educational needs of LAC within the borough was required, with an aim to informing policy and practice thus subsequently improving their outcomes. Following a move to work as a trainee educational psychologist in Borough 2, it was agreed between the PEP and Head of

the Virtual School that a continuation of this research within the borough would also be beneficial.

The start of the research process involved the undertaking of a comprehensive literature review in order to determine what was already known. Studies exploring the educational outcomes of LAC in England date back to the 1970s and the extent of their educational disadvantage are well documented (Jackson and Cameron, 2011). Since 1999, statistics comparing the educational achievement of LAC with the general population have been collected (published since 2002). They demonstrate the significant and widening gap between the levels attained by LAC and others.

There is now a considerable amount of research regarding the school experience and educational achievement of LAC, yet much of it is written from a social care perspective, taking no account of educational or sociological evidence or theoretical insights (Jackson et al, 2011). Previous research tends to view LAC as one homogenous group and has often sought the perspectives of social work professionals and researchers instead of the young people themselves (Goddard, 2000). The importance of exploring their views and experiences is crucial to promoting and extending the educational success of these young people (Stein, 2008) and in fact, LAC represent a group of people with a diverse range of views and experiences. Qualitative studies have demonstrated that the needs and experiences of LAC vary significantly and it is these experiences which shape their future choices and identities (Ward and Skuse, 2003).

Much of the research relating to LAC and education is exclusively concerned with schooling up to 16. Few studies have explored the views and educational experiences of young people post compulsory education. Some research has explored the transition from care to independence. Studies have shown that lack of qualifications lead to severe outcomes for LAC, yet much of the research on leaving care relates to accommodation, employment and budgeting as opposed to education. In a study carried out by Wade and Dixon (2006) they noted that of those young people who progressed to further education, 80% did not complete their course; interestingly there appeared to be little interest in the small number of students who were educationally successful. One empirical study, the By Degrees study (Jackson, Ajayi and Quigley, 2005), explored the educational experiences of a small group of care leavers who attend university; further research of this kind, which seeks to empower young people by identifying and exploring their views, with the aim of informing policy and practice, is essential. Moreover, the value of seeking the views of young people aged between 16-24 (young people at the end of their compulsory schooling and young people

post compulsory education), will provide a broader range of perspectives and a greater understanding of the educational participation amongst this group.

Research question:

What are the views of young people regarding the factors that contribute to the educational success and hindrance of young people from a care background and how does this influence their outcomes?

1.9   Organisation of thesis

Chapter 1 has highlighted the value of conducting research exploring the views and experiences of young people from a care background. The rest of the report is organised into four further chapters. Chapter 2 explores recent legislation concerning LAC. It describes relevant literature/reviews and current debates/issues relating to LAC and education. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used in this research and Chapter 4 explores the study's findings. Finally, Chapter 5 presents the summary and conclusions of the research and the overall contribution of the study.

2.0   Literature review

The aim of the literature review is to collect knowledge obtained through academic literature (including documents relating to national policy and procedures) on educational experiences and pathways of young people from a care background. The intention is to give the reader an overview of what is known at this stage in the research and provide some discussion of the emerging issues.

The selected headings were chosen as they represent a systemic selection of information, based on previous findings relevant to this group of young people. The research is derived from various sources, including previous research, academic institutions, regulatory bodies and individual authors. Some report on qualitative processes and others quantitative. The literature chosen for this review reflects findings of the experiences of children pre and during care, their educational experience and support and perceived support. Implications of this research for EPS and its impact on EPs themselves will be explored in the discussion section following the completion of data collection.

Part one of the literature review will examine legislative and policy frameworks for LAC and their transition to independence. Moreover, it will report on the educational systems and policies in England and those in relation to LAC. Part Two will address the interface between educational attainment and participation and being in care or leaving care. Furthermore it will identify the current position in research, with regards to LAC and identify possible gaps.

2.1   Journey to obtaining relevant papers

A review of the literature was carried out between September 2010 and September 2012. The following databases were used to search electronic journals: PsycInfo, Science Direct and JSTOR. Keywords such as 'LAC' and 'education' were used initially to search for relevant journal articles; key search terms also included relevant synonyms, which were identified using a thesaurus. Additional searches were also carried out on key internet sites, such as the DFE and key articles were scrutinised and reference books examined. The searches were limited to studies published after 1989 (this date reflects the publication of the Children Act 1989, which highlighted the importance of exploring the views of children and

young people). Following this, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. A screening of all titles and abstracts from articles was then carried out in order to ensure that they were empirical studies that focused on the educational experiences of LAC. Studies were included based on the following criteria:

1. Studies published in English
2. Studies published after 1989
3. Study participants were between the ages of 5-24 years. (This included both school aged children and care leavers).

2.2   Care and Welfare in the UK

The major legislative framework governing children are the Children Act (1989) the Children (leaving care) Act (2000) and the Children Act (2004 revised). These provide the basic legal framework for services other than education, i.e. foster, residential and respite care, child protection and family support, day care and early years provision. The Children Act (1989) introduced the term 'LAC', although other terms such as 'Children in Care' and 'Children Looked After' are also used. In 2013 there were approximately 68,000 children in the care of English LA's, of whom 75% were in foster care including 8% who were fostered by a relative or friend. About 9% were living in a residential setting such as children's homes, secure unit, hostel or school (DfE, 2013).

In 2003, a Government Green Paper, Every Child Matters: Change for Children (ECM) was published; this paper highlighted the collective responsibility of Children's Services to improve outcomes of all children. In the years that ECM existed it was concerned with services and quality of life for children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds or those who were not achieving their potential (DfES, 2003b). LA's have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of LAC. Moreover, they have a duty to promote the educational achievement of children in their care, irrespective of where they live. The Children and Young Persons Act (CYPA) (2008) requires that councils make greater efforts to offer local foster and residential placements, instead of placing children elsewhere; the need for LA's to consider the educational implications of decisions taken about a child's care placement is therefore imperative (DfE, 2013). While placing children away from the LA raises concerns, such as placing children in unfamiliar locations and where professional visits are more

difficult to undertake, Berridge (2012) argues that it does not necessarily result in poorer outcomes instead he suggests possibly that children with particular problems require specialist placements, serving a larger regional or national population. Nevertheless, this guidance reflects the LA's wider role as a 'corporate parent' – LAs must strive to offer all the support that a good parent would give to make sure that children in their care reach their full potential. 'Promoting the educational achievement of LAC - statutory guidance for local authorities to help local authorities implement their statutory duty' (DCSF, 2010) highlights a further step towards promoting the needs of LAC. It includes information about the role of the designated teacher introduced by the CYPA (2008) and reflects the school admissions legislation giving priority to LAC.

In England two government commissioned evaluations, The Right2BCared4 and the Staying Put: 18+ Family Placement Programme, aimed at improving outcomes for young people making the transition from care to independence. They provided young people with greater access to support and advocacy, in order to help them make decisions that were right for them. Systems were set up to allow young people to remain in care until the age of 21 years and it encouraged a gradual transition from care to independence - ensuring that they were fully prepared for leaving care. These evaluations highlight the importance of involving young people in decisions that involve them, for example, the Right2BCared4 evaluation emphasises the importance of enabling young people to participate meaningfully at each stage of the transition process and ensuring that their pathways plans reflect the needs and wishes of the young people (Munro, Lushey and Ward, 2011)

2.3   Care and education

The educational attainment of young people in care was a largely neglected policy area until recently. Research has found that LAC significantly under-perform educationally compared with their peers and achieve minimal educational qualifications or none (Fletcher-Campbell and Archer, 2003). The primary cause for this neglect of education within the care system was that 'care' and 'education' were administratively and conceptually separate; it was the launch of ECM that triggered the merger of these two separate departments (Cameron et al, 2010). This has been further enhanced by the Education, Health and Care plan (EHC) and subsequent policy (DfE/DH, 2013).

In the hope of reducing the discrepancy between the achievements of LAC and other children a number of major UK government initiatives have been introduced (Goddard, 2000). In 1994, largely in response to the findings and recommendations of the Utting Report (1991) and the Warner Report (1992), the DFEE and the DH issued joint guidance on the education of LAC in Circular 13/94 (DfEE, 1994). Furthermore, in 1998, the Quality Protects programme was launched, followed in 2000 by the Guidance on the education of LAC (DfEE/DH, 2000), replacing Circular 13/94. While this move aimed to encourage closer and clearer alliances between education, social services and health in England and Wales, it also provided a move towards the promotion and improvement of the education of LAC within each department (Jacklin, Robinson and Torrance, 2006).

The Quality Protects initiative (DH, 1998) sets LAs specific targets for the educational outcomes of LAC; the targets have recently been revised (Smith, 2003) to highlight the importance of bringing LAC's educational performance in line with their non-looked after peers and increase participation through setting targets relating to the promotion of LAC sitting GCSE's (Harker et al, 2004). Equally, LAs are being assisted in their efforts to meet educational targets for LAC through the joint guidance provided by the DFEE and the DH (2000) (Harker, 2011).

The importance of education for children in care was further highlighted in the Children Act (2000), which sought to promote a more 'holistic' or multi-dimensional approach to the process of leaving care and to accentuate the continuing corporate parenting responsibilities of LAs (Cameron, Bennert, Simon and Wigfall, 2007). These principles led to the publication of ECM (DfES, 2004) and the subsequent Children Act (2004), which stressed the need for LAs to promote a LAC's educational achievement; a vital component of the care plan is the child's PEP (DfES, 2005), which should reflect the importance of the personalised approach to learning while stretching aspirations and creating life chances (Craddock, 2008).These initiatives have most recently led to the introduction of the Care Matters white paper (2007), a radical programme of reform, set out to improve the outcomes of LAC and further to its implementation plan, Care matters: Time to deliver for Children in Care (2008); a guide for supporting professionals working in the sector to improve the achievements LAC.

The introduction of the CYPA (2008) is a further step towards supporting the needs of children in and leaving care. The CYPA took forward some of the commitments in the White Paper Care Matters (2007). The purpose of the Act is to reform the statutory framework for the care system by implementing the proposals in the White Paper requiring primary legislation. The four key principles enshrined in the legislation include; corporate parenting

for every person involved in the lives of LAC; the voice of the young person; stability and continuity; high aspirations. These four principles clearly support previous research, thus emphasising these principles as contributory factors to the educational achievement of children in care and care leavers (Jackson and Ajayi, 2007).

Recent amendments to the CYPA include: promoting the well-being of care leavers who are over the age of 18 and under the age of 25 and providing financial assistance to young people wishing to pursue higher education in accordance with their pathway plan (NCAS, 2008). For many young people the prospect of going to university is extremely daunting and for those in care, the lack of parental support or a home to return to outside term time makes university life almost unreachable (Craddock, 2008).

Further initiatives aimed at improving the educational outcomes of LAC, is the pupil premium. The pupil premium, first introduced in 2011, is additional funding given to publicly funded schools in England to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and close the gap between them and their peers.

Further developments regarding the care and education of LAC is the introduction of EHCs. The Children and Families Act (2014) introduces radical changes to the SEN framework. The Act replaces SEN statements (for schools) and Learning Difficulty Assessments (for young people in further education and training) with single 0-25 EHCs. Over 70% of LAC have SEN and it is likely that a significant proportion of these will have an EHC (DfE/DH, 2013).

LA's have a statutory duty to promote the educational achievement of children in their care; in most LA's the virtual school team will track the progress of LAC by the authority. The Children and Families Bill will require every LA to appoint an officer who is an employee of that or another authority to discharge that duty. SEND departments will need to work closely with the head of the Virtual school, as well as social workers, to ensure that LA's have effective and joined up processes for meeting the SEN of LAC (DfE/DH, 2013).

These policies emphasise the importance of education and employment, yet few of the more recent measures aimed at improving the educational opportunities and attainments of LAC have yet to be tested in action and thus far there are no rigorous evaluation studies (Hojer, Johansson, Hill, Cameron, and Jackson, 2008). Simon and Owen (2006) suggest that a coherent authority-wide policy or specific strategies for identifying educational needs should be developed and provided to LA's. Moreover, they propose that monitoring systems and

evaluation studies to assess the educational progress of LAC should be implemented; as this will increase the speed at which these children are identified and supported (Gorham, 2009). It is important to note however, that these systems will be dependent on their appropriate and consistent use, by the large number of professionals involved with LAC (DfES, 2006); effective collaboration and communication amongst professional groups may be challenging, considering their differing approaches to working and possible understandings of what is required of a corporate parent (Gorham, 2009).

Studies examining the views of LAC on the important issues in relation to education allude to barriers and facilitators for achieving. For example, Harker et al (2004) explored LAC's perception of support for education and noted factors perceived as supportive included encouragement to do well, practical support such as a place to do work or appropriate housing for care leavers at university, continuity within schools and within placements, financial support for care leavers, support in the form of educational advice and emotional support. Cameron (2007) researched the issue of education and self-reliance for LAC and noted that young people viewed support for education as a key component to achieving. Buchanan (1995) comments on the importance of education for LAC – she noted that LAC perceive themselves to be educationally disadvantaged for being looked after. Moreover, Baldry and Kemis (1998) noted a clear need and wish by young people for help and support with their educational needs.

Particular barriers that emerged in previous research were factors perceived to be associated with being looked after (for example, Harker et al, 2004) such as the emotional upset of events leading up to and including being put into care, issues relating to the stigma of being in care, disjointed educational careers as a result of being moved around in the care system. Martin and Jackson (2002) noted that in particular LAC felt that encouragement and support were often lacking, owing to low expectations and a view that by some that LAC would not do well at school.

The views of LAC regarding the factors that facilitate or act as a barrier to them achieving in their education will be explored in more detail later on in the literature review.

2.4   Educational attainment of LAC

The educational underachievement of LAC is well known; evidence has demonstrated that LAC achieve results considerably lower than their peers; peers in national school tests and their relative performance declines as they get older, contributing to their limited number of GCSEs at 16. However, accurate information on the degree and nature of this disadvantage is not always accessible, due to poor record keeping at a local level, potentially contributing to errors in national data (O'Sullivan and Westerman, 2007) and while educational statistics are only available for young people in care up to the age of 16, the gap in achievement remains so great that the concern mainly affects year on year comparisons without changing the general picture (Hojer, 2008).

Figures released by the DfE (2013) highlight the discrepancy between the achievements of LAC and other children. In 2013, 50% of LAC achieved the expected level 4 at Key Stage 2 compared with 79% of all children. Similarly at Key Stage 3, 30% of LAC attained the expected level 5, compared with 74% of all children. At Key Stage 4, 44% of LAC obtained at least one GCSE, compared with 99% of all children, (demonstrating that while pupils were able to sit the examinations, one or two passes at low grades would rarely qualify them for further education (Hojer et al, 2008)), 37% of LAC achieved 5+ A*-C at GCSE compared with 80% of all children and only 15% achieved the 5+ A*-C at GCSE (including English and Maths) compared with 58% of all children. Test results are also significantly lower for younger LAC and there are worse records of days missed from school and permanent exclusions (DfE, 2013).

At the end of Year 11, 66% of LAC remained in full-time education compared to 80% of all school leavers (DfE, 2013). Further statistics demonstrate that 34% of care leavers are not in education, employment or training (NEET) at age 19; 29% of this cohort are in education other than higher, with a further 23% in training or employment (NCAS, 2013). 6% of care leavers aged 19 continue onto higher education; this represents an improvement on the 1% estimate of the SEU (2003), although the figure is artificially inflated by the numbers of "ambitious asylum seekers" n some London boroughs (Jackson and McParlin, 2006) and still compares very poorly with the figure of 39% of the general school population (Jackson et al, 2007). Information on higher levels of qualification such as A-levels or university degrees was not recorded for care leavers. Even using this very small measure, the gap between the attainment of LAC and others remains considerable and is growing as educational attainment improves overall (DfE, 2013).

Studies of care leavers found a lack of educational qualifications when compared with other young people. Dixon et al. (2004) noted, in a quantitative study, that 54% of care leavers (from a sample of 106) did not have any qualifications, although 35% were participating in education after the age of 16 (however, among the participating group 80% dropped out after a short time). Moreover, they found that 47% of their sample held one or more GCSEs of any grade while 19% held the expected 5+ A*- C GCSE's. It is noteworthy that some of these young people achieved their GCSEs after leaving school, possibly explaining the inconsistency with official figures (Hojer et al, 2008). In both studies over one third of care leavers reported that they had no qualifications.

While the data collection is not yet detailed enough to demonstrate national trends, it highlights the discrepancy between educational potential and attainment, which increases as children in care get older, with, for example, a shortfall between predicted results at age 14 and actual results at age 16 (Evans, 2000). Hojer et al (2008) noted, in a qualitative study, that for children in long-term care, attainment closer to the average at primary school went into decline at the point of transition to secondary education, where children were less likely to receive individual attention from known teachers (Wetz 2008).

Although research continues to demonstrate poor educational outcomes for LAC, authors have questioned the analyses and explanations by researchers, policy makers, professionals and the media, of the low academic achievement of LAC as insufficient or simplistic. Berridge, (2007; 2012), notes that greater acknowledgement of some of the wider sociological, social policy and indeed educational literature is necessary, to develop a sufficient understanding of the situation. Much of the information on the educational attainments of LAC is derived from official statistics; for which there are numerous reports on the social construction of these figures (Cicourel, 1994). This, Berridge (2007) suggests, demonstrates that "rather than being objective indicators of the truth, the social processes behind the formulation of published statistics denote that they remain unclear" (p4). He notes, "Meanings and interpretations of terms may be problematic; gaps exist in data collection; errors are made; there are pressures to achieve 'performance indicators'; and the underlying rationale behind certain indicators may be misleading or flawed" (p4). Nevertheless, despite their limitations, the statistical data for LAC still provide a rich source of aggregate data and are useful in raising awareness of this vulnerable group.

With regard to the educational outcome indicators for LAC, GCSE statistics now reflect Year 11 pupils who have been accommodated for more than 12 months (DfE, 2013). The educational performance of care leavers is recorded, only for those that were in care at age

16; this may be problematic as it does not take into account time spent in care or whether some may have left care before undertaking any examinations (NCAS, 2013). Moreover, it is important to note that over a quarter of LAC have a statement of SEN; this compares to only 3% of the overall school population (Berridge, 2007).

2.5 Factors contributing to educational outcomes

Evidence suggests that while educational achievement among the general population is rising, improvements in the educational attainment of LAC is not. Studies consistently highlight a gap between the educational potential and achievement of LAC, which grows wider as children in care get older (Hojer et al, 2008). Numerous contributors have been highlighted as possible explanations for the poor educational outcomes of LAC.

2.5.1 Pre-care experiences

The adverse pre-care experiences and characteristics of LAC have been identified as a partial explanation for the educational disadvantage of LAC (Sinclair and Gibbs, 1998). Quantitative studies have found that risk factors such as poverty, low levels of parental education and social capital, parental maltreatment, parental separation or death and parental alcohol misuse can significantly impact a person's educational achievement (Borland, Pearson, Hill, Tisdall and Bloomfield, 1998). For example, small scale studies conducted in the early 1990s, examining the relationship between socio risk, maltreatment and education outcomes, pointed to the academic vulnerability of maltreated youth, in comparison to non-maltreated youth from impoverished socio-economic backgrounds (i.e. Kurtz, Gaudin, Wodarski and Rowing, 1993). These initial findings were replicated in repeated analyses of two larger data sets (i.e. Kendall-Tackett and Eckenrode, 1996), further demonstrating a relationship between maltreatment and indicators of socio-demographic risk, with lower reading and mathematics test scores, high absenteeism and increased likelihood of school year repetition (Stone, 2007).

While pre-care experiences certainly contribute to the low attainment of LAC, the failure to address the aftermath of such experiences or the impact of separation when children are removed from their families, will also contribute (Jackson et al, 2006). Williams, Jackson, Maddocks et al, (2001) found that LAC were more likely to suffer from mental health problems than their peers, but were much less likely to receive any treatment (Jackson et al, 2006). Moreover, teachers were not likely to be informed of a child's history nor were they likely to be provided with the appropriate training to understand the care system or to manage the behaviour of many of them (Comfort, 2004). This therefore suggests that there are a number of factors that may be contributing to the poor educational and life outcomes of LAC.

2.5.2   The care system

Numerous explanations have been put forward for the low educational attainments of LAC. Some researchers have argued that the care system that is to blame (Gilligan, 2007a); influential factors contributing to their adversity include: amount of time spent in care (Cheung and Heath, 1994), type of care placement (Hayden, 2005), frequency and number of placement changes (Jackson, 2001). These experiences have varying effects on children and young people regarding their ability to build and sustain significant relationships, their attitudes towards school and learning and self-esteem (Hojer et al, 2008). These will be further explored later.

2.5.3   Special Educational Needs

Evidence suggests that a contributing factor to the educational underachievement of LAC is the high prevalence of SEN amongst this cohort compared with children overall. In 2013, 68% of LAC for whom data were available had a SEN, this compared with 18% of all children with SEN; 28% of whom had a statement of SEN, compared to 3% of all children with SEN (DfE, 2013). Moreover, they were more likely to attend special school provision or attached units than children who live with their parents, even if their needs were not severe (SEU, 2003).

Research studies of LAC note similar findings. In a longitudinal study of children entering care in a Midlands authority over a four-year period, Evan (2000) found that LAC were 13

times more likely than others to have a statement of SEN and those with statements were attending special schools; this compared to the majority of children in their own families attending mainstream schools. Moreover, Gordon, Parker, Loughran, and Heslop, (2000) in a reanalysis of the OPCS (Office of Population Censuses and Surveys - a population screen and follow up, estimating and comparing levels of disability, calibrating severity. Adults and children in general and institutional populations covered) disability survey, demonstrated that the nature of disabilities among LAC was far less severe than children residing at home, yet, those not in care were more likely to attend mainstream schools; even within mainstream schools a high proportion of LAC were assigned to special units, which can offer limited opportunities for academic achievement (Galloway et al, 1994). In a further quantitative study conducted by Martin, Ford, Goodman et al, (2014) higher levels of severe physical disability were found among LAC; many of whom will access respite care and are considered to be looked after.

Studies aimed at identifying the specific SEN of LAC have found that a high proportion of their statements are for emotional and behavioural difficulties, a likely contributing factor affecting their educational progress (DH, 2003). In a qualitative study carried out by Fletcher et al, (2003) examining the role of the school in supporting the educational needs of LAC, the most significant obstacle reported by teachers was how best to manage their challenging behaviour. Moreover, for many LAC, pre-existing educational and behavioural difficulties and exclusion episodes have been found to be a significant contributing factor in the decision to place them away from home. Francis, (2000) found that pupils' school records, highlighting educational and behavioural problems, contributed to LAC's decision making panels to place eight of the 14 children in a retrospective group sample and three of the 13 children in a prospective group, in care.

2.5.4   Social and behavioural difficulties in school

The educational attainment of LAC, due to behavioural problems falls even farther behind that of the general population than those in care for other reasons (Hojer et al, 2008). Jackson et al, (2005) note that 64% of girls and 67% of boys who were in care because of behaviour problems, held few educational qualifications; this compares with 41% of girls and 48% boys in care for other reasons, with corresponding educational outcomes. Results

further demonstrate that in fact, only 18% of girls and 10% of boys who were placed in care due to their behavioural difficulties had more than a basic education.

These patterns of educational achievement were previously demonstrated by Stein (1994). He commented on the findings of three studies of care leavers who had attended leaving care schemes or were followed up after leaving the care of one social services department. Most had no qualifications and in one of the studies 20% of the social workers were unsure as to whether their young people have any qualifications (Stein 1994). Moreover, Ward (1995) also remarked on the lack of knowledge and awareness of social workers with regard to the educational attainment of the young people for whom they were responsible; sections of forms in which they were required to provide information about the young person's educational development or possible concerns were not completed.

Evidence suggests that a contributing factor to the low attainment of LAC, as a result of behavioural problems, is school absence. School absence is a major barrier to attainment for many LAC and as demonstrated above, behaviour difficulties resulting in school exclusions, is a contributing factor to this. The SEU (2003) reports that LAC are at increased risk of being excluded from school than children not in care. Moreover, qualitative research demonstrates that foster carers/social workers were reported to be less likely to appeal against such decisions and were less determined than parents in fighting for their readmission (Hojer et al, 2008); the probability of returning to mainstream school or achieving qualifications is significantly reduced following an exclusion.

2.5.5   Socio-economic disadvantage

LAC come from among the most socially disadvantaged groups in society. In a qualitative study Cameron et al. (2007) compared the educational attainment of care leavers with other young people who had experienced similar childhood disadvantage, whilst not being in care. They found that while a similar proportion of young people in each group had left school with no qualifications, more of the disadvantaged group (never in care) held five or more GCSEs. It is important to note however, that the data was collected from a sample of young people aged 17 -24 whose experience of GCSEs was before recent policy moves to improve the support for LAC. Moreover, reports also relied on the personal accounts of these young people, which may be unreliable (Hojer et al, 2008). Nevertheless, the data does suggest

that social and economic disadvantage may be contributing to the difficulties LAC are having as well as their experiences in care.

Berridge (2007) has drawn implications from the research and argues that conclusions about the poor educational outcomes of LAC are disproportionately attributed to in-care factors rather than other characteristics of a young person's life, such as their early life experiences or the relatively high incidence of SEN among LAC. Moreover, he suggests that other wider social influences such as social class may be a more important factor.

While these findings may be of value when reflecting on the attainments of those entering the care system as an adolescent, it does not fully explain the apparent persistence of these effects when children come into care in early childhood and are removed from the negative influences and situations of neglect and abuse they may have experienced (Jackson 2000). Instead it may be that other factors including organisational and practice led factors may be contributing to the educational outcomes of LAC. Evidence suggests that the long term consequences of exposure to adversity often result in children entering the care system and experiencing additional social, emotional, behavioural difficulties. For example, LAC are four times more likely to require support from mental health services, yet few receive the support they need and their disruptive behaviour often leads to a run of exclusions (Jackson and Sachdev 2001).

2.5.6 Absence

As noted above, research has found an association between school absences and poor attainment (O'Sullivan and Westerman, 2007); this is further demonstrated statistically in the Green Paper, Care Matters (DCSF, 2006). Movements in care, amongst other factors, have been shown to be a common cause of absences, which too, is a frequent occurrence in the educational careers of LAC. In a small qualitative study of 32 young people, Cameron et al (2010) noted that fourteen reported significant absences (at least one period of 3 months or more) and six young people reported spending 12 months or more out of school. Reasons given for poor attendance included: families that did not encourage regular attendance at school; 'chaotic' birth families, resulting in numerous changes of location and frequent crises and upheavals. Further explanations, for the earlier stages of schooling included, parental sickness and incapacity due to drug dependency or alcohol misuse. Many of the disruptions, particularly movements between placements and school often took place during critical

moments in their secondary education, such as during the two-year-run-up to their GCSE's and/or during the exam period itself.

2.5.7   Stability and continuity

Commonly reported as an explanation for the poor educational outcomes of LAC include placement changes and school instability. Francis (2000) found that instability of placements, including frequent care moves and resulting changes of school, hindered children's educational progress; changing placements may also result in changes in school, curricula or loss of coursework, supportive social networks and the infrastructure of educational success (O'Sullivan and Westerman 2007). Moreover, further qualitative research carried out by Fletcher-Campbell et al, (2003) noted that young people with most changes of placement were least likely to be entered for GCSEs. Indeed, some researchers have found a relationship between the number of moves in care and school and educational qualifications gained (Stein, 1994), particularly during the later years of compulsory schooling (Jackson et al 2001). No research has looked at periods of most disruption for LAC.

Evidence has repeatedly demonstrated that stability and continuity are essential contributors to ensuring that LAC achieve educational success; early onset of and long-term foster placements have been directly linked to educational success and higher educational achievement. Qualitative research carried out by Cameron (2007) found that care leavers holding qualifications had less placement changes and longer-term foster care placements. This compared with care leavers, who having experienced numerous placements or a mixture of placements (family base and residential/institutional), were less likely to have educational qualifications. Moreover, Jackson et al, (2005) found that among young people who had gone to university from care, most had spent five or more years looked after and most had had fewer than three placements (i.e. less than average). This group of young people had achieved relatively stable and supportive childhoods through being in care. They had attained educational qualifications close to the norm for their age group; with around 70% having 5 GCSEs (A*-C). Most attributed their success to support from foster carers who gave high importance to education (Jackson and Ajayi, 2007). However, it is questionable as to whether even these comparatively successful care leavers had fulfilled their true potential. A disproportionate number had studied at the less prestigious further education colleges

rather than staying on at school and had chosen vocational rather than academic subjects at university, possibly limiting their chances of further progression or of obtaining stable, well-paid employment (Jackson et al. 2005). Stein (2005) notes, that the relationship between stability of placement and successful outcomes must be viewed within the context of the personality of the child and/or carer.

2.5.8   Significant adults

The-concept-of attachment, highlighted by Bowlby (1953) suggests that children have an innate, proximity seeking behaviour towards a caregiver for the purposes of gaining physical and emotional comfort and protection. Children defined as securely attached include those whose cognitive and affective experiences are integrated, who possess considerable confidence, who are more tolerant and generous and who appear to have a greater capacity to deal with the inevitable conflict with peers (Sroufe, 1996). Securely attached children appear to be more curious about the world and therefore keener to learn (Schore, 2001).

There are significant implications of attachment theory for LAC. It is well established that many LAC will have experienced extreme difficulties in their families of origin, as well as in their ecological context of school, neighbourhood and community (Bebbington and Miles, 1989). They are likely to have experienced abuse, neglect or other trauma as well as the effects of distorted family relationships (Berridge and Brodie, 1998); including cases of physical and sexual abuse (Barter, Renold, Berridge and Cawson, 2004). Compounded by a series of (often unplanned or short-notice) moves from one family or environment to another (Utting, 1997), sometimes including multiple changes of school, community and peer-group (Stein 1994), many children in care are exposed to weak or broken attachments and long term difficulties developing secure attachments (Ward, Munro & Dearden, 2006).

Schore (2001) suggests that a secure attachment, can influence the development of the right brain - responsible for the human stress response; facilitating the expansion of a child's coping strategies.   Research comparing LAC with matched peers suggests that early relationships can influence the coherence and organisation of psychological functions, including narrative coherence, intentionality and avoidance (Greig, Minnis, Millward, Sinclair, Kennedy, Towlson et al., 2008). Geddes (2009) further suggests that having experienced an

absence of responsiveness and care, exacerbated by a threat from the source of their security, it is likely that LAC will progress through life with persistent and overwhelming fears, anxiety and helplessness, often resulting in hyper-vigilant behaviours (Moore, 1995). Consequently, LAC often have difficulties forming relationships with key people such as teachers and foster parents; significantly impacting their educational development (McAuley and Young, 2006).

Considering attachment in relation to learning and education, Geddes (2009) identifies a relationship between different early attachment patterns and responses to learning. She suggests that in contrast to a securely attached child, the learning profile of a pupil concurrent with, for example, a disorganised attachment, will demonstrate intense anxiety, great difficulty experiencing trust in the authority of the teacher, may be unable to accept being taught and may have difficulty accepting the teacher is more knowledgeable than they are and/or difficulty accepting 'not knowing'. There can be limited use of imagination and creativity and underachievement.

Propositions have been made, suggesting that schools and teachers are in the best position to influence the educational paths of LAC; in viewing a school as a 'secure base' in which pupils can function effectively both emotionally and cognitively it is possible to manage their anxieties, in providing compensatory relationships and experiences, contributing to the development of resilience (Geddes 2009). Cameron (2007) suggest that as schools and teachers spend a great deal of time with the same children, they are best placed to act as mentors for those whose early lives have been unreliable and bleak. The influence of a mentor or supportive adult has been established as an important external factor encouraging vulnerable children to achieve. LAC reported that having a significant adult in their lives, who offered consistent support and encouragement, has been strongly linked to educational success and positive outcomes (McParlin, 1996)

Having a positive, consistent and stabilizing relationship with a significant other, has consistently demonstrated to be of great importance in providing emotional support and encouraging successful educational outcomes for LAC and those having left care (Lucey and Walkerdine, 2000). In a quantitative study DuBois and Silverthorn (2005) found that young people who have a natural mentoring relationship were more likely to exhibit positive outcomes in the area of education/work (i.e. school, college attendance, working ten or more hours per week) and have better psychological wellbeing and physical health. Moreover, in a qualitative study Cameron et al, (2007) noted that care leavers appreciated the support of leaving care workers, when offered practical help and emotional support that was reliably

available; the lack of a dedicated worker was viewed as unhelpful by care leavers, as was help provided at the wrong time or suddenly withdrawn. Jackson et al (2007) reported that care leavers attributed educational success to the remedial efforts of their foster carers and the knowledge that there was someone who cared for them, wanted them to succeed and enabled them to achieve educationally. Furthermore, Mallon (2007) found that the value of a mentor was reported to be as important for adults in the attainment of academic success.

In contrast, the absence of a supportive and significant adult in the lives of LAC has been found to have a detrimental effect on their educational outcomes. Qualitative studies (e.g. Jackson et al, 2012) have noted a lack of commitment and interest from professionals, towards the education of LAC. Francis (2000) reported that professionals have exhibited low expectations, including a lack of adequate attention by social workers/care staff to the educational needs of LAC. Moreover, Harker et al, (2004) found that social workers, teachers and carers did not give children's educational progress and standards of achievement priority, compared with the attention given to matters such as physical and emotional needs including care, relationships and contact with parents; studies report that for those working with LAC, the emphasis was placed on immediate as opposed to long-term developmental needs, ensuring that children were fed, watered, clothed and sheltered (Craddock, 2008). Even in cases where foster parents support and encourage young people educationally by enforcing school attendance and attending school events, many were limited by their own low level of education and unfamiliarity with college and university systems (Cameron et al, 2010). A lack of systematic support and encouragement for education was further demonstrated by social workers. Considering that unemployment is closely related to formal qualifications, it is surprising that education is not considered of higher priority.

2.5.9   Educational expectations

Labelling by teachers, social workers and carers has also been reported as a possible explanation for the poor educational outcomes of LAC. Francis (2000) noted that children were often regarded as 'delinquents', with little interest in school or educational achievement; further comments included lacking the potential to achieve academic success or having too many other pressing issues, to manage the additional demands of schoolwork. Craddock (2008) emphasises the need to challenge the negative stereotypes and low expectations of LAC, if they are to achieve at the level of their peers. Having explored the

views of high achieving care leavers, he stresses the importance of correcting unfair labels and the value of 'normalising' the lives of LAC. He suggests that one strategy to achieving normalisation, would be for staff to explore opportunities for LAC to socialise with others not connected to the care environment (Craddock, 2008). The importance of structure, discipline and consistency, have also been highlighted by high achieving care leavers as a method for achieving normalisation (Jackson et al, 2007). It would appear that creating an environment that employs these principles, will harness the educational interest and success of LAC (Jackson et al, 2007).

Consistently, research has highlighted carers who value education and who encourage persons in their care to achieve, as key components to attaining positive educational outcomes for LAC (Craddock, 2008). LAC have acknowledged efforts made by their foster parents/social workers and teachers as key contributing factors to their educational achievements or educational recovery. Jackson et al, (2007) noted that for one young person, while her foster parents were not able to go to university, they encouraged her to work hard - she reported that they assisted her learning through daily reading. A further example is of a young woman whose foster mother told social services she would be going to university. She stated that this support and level of expectation encouraged her to strive for success and achieve educationally.

Jackson et al, (2007) further demonstrated that an essential component in supporting LAC to achieve educationally was having foster parents who had attended university and/or whose older children had gone to university, by providing practical advice as well as acting as role models to these young people. Interestingly, even carers who did not have educational qualifications demonstrated their value for education and school, in paying for educational equipment, such as books and computers, in fighting for extra support in school, or in providing private tuition for those children who had fallen behind, due to interruptions in their schooling.

2.5.10 Self-efficacy and self-reliance

Whilst much of the research involving LAC highlights the persistence of poor educational outcomes, more recent studies have addressed the role that self-reliance and resilience have in escaping adversity and poor outcomes (Chase, Jackson and Simon, 2006).

The notion of resilience refers to the ability to overcome adversity and cope with significant difficulties and disadvantage (Dent et al, 2003). Resilience stems, in part, from a sense of self-efficacy (Rutter, 1985) the ability to foster resilience in children and young people is crucial in overcoming hardship (Gilligan, 2001).

Recent qualitative research has demonstrated that care leavers often have a considerable degree of interest in and commitment to education and that central to their eventual success is their own motivation and initiative-taking; their ability to take charge of their learning and be active in the process of their own learning (Moran, 2007). Cameron (2007) describes this process of self-motivation and independence as 'self-reliance'; having self-confidence to manage one's own affairs and preferring no help. These dimensions, she suggests can operate either simultaneously or independently; a person may accept help, yet still remain independent, while, others distrust offers of help following repeated experiences of disappointment. Cameron et al (2007) notes that care leavers undertaking further education reported self-reliance and initiative taking as methods for managing areas of their lives, examples included, dealing with living arrangements and managing entry to college/university; these they reported were examples of where they had been the principal agent of their education and success.

Authors have previously drawn implications from the research. Moran (2007) argues that schools are best placed to enable LAC to develop these qualities of self-efficacy and reliance, by providing an enriched curriculum, having high expectations and providing teaching that explicitly scaffolds learning steps appropriate to the individual child. Resilience, self-esteem and self-efficacy are crucial concepts in the education of all children but specifically those who are traumatised and have been separated from their families; instilling LAC with the necessary skills to develop resilience will enable them to succeed educationally and take control of their lives (Newman, 2004).

Jackson et al (2006) suggests that in order to improve the educational attainments of LAC it is necessary to adopt a holistic approach, taking into account all aspects of the young persons life before, during and after a placement. Moreover, they highlight the importance of

placing less emphasis on the difficult early experiences of these young people and instead suggest concentrating on the strengths and resources that can significantly impact their futures. Furthermore, Jackson and Thomas (2001) stress the need to put schooling on the same footing as emotional and behavioural treatment, to ensure that young people gain the necessary qualifications to embark on further education and/or employment; the importance of stability and continuity for young people must be considered at all times (Hojer et al, 2008).

2.5.11 Informal learning and activities

Currently there is little research regarding the social, leisure and informal learning lives of young people in or leaving care and the possible benefits for education engagement and outcomes. Quantitative studies, mainly conducted in the US with general populations of young people, have found evidence of a relationship between spare time activities and positive educational gains. Broh (2002) reported positive educational outcomes and academic gains of pupils participating in interscholastic and with-in school sports and to a lesser degree, from participation in music groups. In a further study carried out by Darling (2005), involvement in extra-curricular activities in school, resulted in better academic gains, a more positive attitude towards school life and enabled young people to adjust to the school environment (Barber Stone, Hunt, and Eccles, 2005). Authors have suggested, however, that these findings and those of similar studies, rely heavily on the nature of the activity, the quality and duration of the young person's engagement, the quality of adult commitment in relation to the activity within the school or other setting and the interest of the parent (Gilligan, 2007).

Quantitative studies examining the relationship between participation in activities, educational outcomes and social support produced similar results. In a national cohort study of children in long-term foster care, Daly and Gilligan (2005) found a relationship between those experiencing social support from friendships and participation in activities and positive educational and schooling experiences. Further studies have demonstrated positive results for LAC involved in part-time employment, with regards to social, psychological and educational gains (Bidart and Lavenu, 2005). Pecora et al, (2006) found that having employment experience while still at school increased the likelihood of the young person completing high school. Those LAC with 'intermittent employment experience' were over twice as likely to complete high school, compared to young people who had no such

experience; for those with 'extensive employment experience', the odds of completing high school were over four times as likely than those with no such experience (Gilligan, 2007). Moreover, Dworsky (2005) examined the economic progress of care leavers and found that those who had the experience of being employed, whilst still in care, fared better in terms of securing employment upon leaving care. A key feature of spare-time activities is that they encourage engagement with committed adults, who, it is suggested, significantly contribute to outcomes of LAC, given the appropriate support (Rhodes et al, 2006). There is evidence that establishing a positive relationship with a significant adult, (who may, in turn, continue to serve a mentoring role in the young person's life), may offer these young persons' better outcomes, in terms of academic success, securing employment and risk-taking behaviour (Grossman and Bulle, 2006).

2.6   Post-compulsory education

As yet, there are no accurate records of the number of LAC who enter further and higher education; the DfE statistical rules do not count all of the 19 year olds that leaving care services support (NCAS, 2013). For example, young people who enter care after their 16th birthday are not part of the cohort. Nevertheless, in 2013, 6% of care leavers aged 19 continued onto higher education (DfE, 2013).

Studies have found much better adult outcomes for those young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who continue their education to university level than would be expected for other young people from a similar background (Jackson and Simon 2006). This was demonstrated in a study carried out by Jackson and Martin (1998). They compared 'high achievers' with a care background to a matched group of young people of the same age and background who were less successful at school and found significant differences in their post-care experience. The less successful group presented a typical picture for care leavers of unemployment, dependence on welfare, poor health, early parenthood, substandard housing and intermittent homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse and some of the young men were in custody. In comparison, the 'high achievers' had relatively few difficulties and appeared to have overcome their childhood disadvantage to a large extent.

In a further qualitative study carried out by Jackson et al, (2005) three successive cohorts of 50 students were recruited and interviewed over a five year period. They found the most successful had benefited from a stable foster care placement, which continued to offer emotional and practical support throughout their university career (Jackson et al, 2007). When asked to reflect on the factors contributing to their success, the two most common explanations were the affection and commitment of their foster carers and their own determination and resilience. Also noteworthy was that traumatic experience, early abuse and neglect need not prevent academic attainment; the participants came from disadvantaged backgrounds and gave various forms of maltreatment as the main reason for being removed from their birth families (Hojer et al, 2008).

Similar results were found by the YIPPEE project (Jackson et al, 2011). They noted that the factors most commonly reported by young people that contribute to positive educational outcomes were stability of placement and schooling, being placed with carers who gave priority to education, feeling there was someone who cared about them and their achievements and having sufficient financial support and suitable accommodation to pursue their educational objectives. The more successful young people were strongly motivated to have a better life than their parents and clearly saw education as the path to that end.

2.7 An overview of the research

Most of government research in this area is based on statistics and paints a rather worrying picture without illustrating examples to help one understand the functions that lead to this pattern of outcomes. Qualitative research, in contrast, illuminates stark statistics and makes more sense on how to progress this agenda. This thesis aims to contribute towards the bank of qualitative research by exploring firsthand accounts from LAC.

2.8 Conclusions

The literature reviewed in this chapter has outlined the current legislative context in the UK for LAC. It has examined the educational pathways of LAC and has explored the factors that may contribute towards their educational outcomes. There are some gaps in the literature

such as, studies examining the views of LAC, and while recent research has recognised the importance of seeking the views of LAC, a greater and richer understanding of their opinions and experiences is needed. Moreover, much of the research has tended to focus on school aged children, little is known about the experiences of young people at the end of their care experience and care leavers and the factors that may have influenced their decision as to whether to continue onto further and/or higher education. In conclusion, this current thesis will explore the views and experiences of young people from a care background, between the ages of 16-24 and will identify the potential factors that contribute towards or hinder their educational outcomes.

3.0 Methodology

Chapter 2 presented the protective and risk factors, reported in previous research, associated with the educational attainment of LAC. Chapter 3 will explore issues relating to methodology, ethical issues and the constraints and issues considered when carrying out this research. This chapter will also provide details of the procedure used to collect information, both in the initial stage of the study and in the second stage of implementing formal methods of data collection. Issues relating to the reliability and validity of the information obtained will also be reviewed.

3.1. Research question and how it was explored

The purpose of the research was to explore the factors that promote or hinder the educational outcomes of LAC, by examining the views and experiences of young people from a care background, aged between 16-24, in two local authorities. The study sought to investigate the educational profiles of young people from a care background, their views and plans in relation to education and the action taken to realise them.

The study adopted a participatory research methods approach by inviting young people to share their views and experiences about aspects of their own lives (Holland et al, 2010). In doing so, young people in this current thesis were encouraged, to some extent, to direct the course of their interviews, within the overall themes of the research. The value of seeking the views and experiences of young people was to provide a much greater and richer understanding of the needs of LAC, in the hope of reshaping their educational experience and subsequent outcomes.

In order to gain an understanding of the young person's social world, through the use of exploratory methods of data collection, it was important, initially, that the researcher develop a relationship with the young people; this was to ensure that they feel comfortable and safe to share their views and experiences. Thomas and O'Kane (1998) suggest that participatory techniques can assist in breaking down imbalances of power. Moreover, the researcher was able to gain a better understanding of the needs and routines of these young people, which was necessary in shaping the design and implementation of the study.

There was limited evidence available at the start of the study, as few national statistics are kept about the educational qualifications and careers of this group in England. Nevertheless previous research suggests that this group of young people is characterised by a lack of educational qualifications and are seriously under-represented in further and higher education; more than a third of young people NEETs are from a care background (NCAS, 2013). As reported in Chapter 2, recent legislation has outlined specific measures to support continued attendance in higher education.

3.2. The approach adopted by the study

Creswell (2007) makes clear the impact of a researcher's belief system about the world, on the way in which new findings are interpreted and subsequently reported. When conducting a qualitative study it is therefore important to consider the philosophical standpoint of the researcher; illuminating concepts and ideas is a key responsibility of the researcher.

In recent years participatory research has gained increasing importance as a research strategy within qualitative social research (Bergold and Thomas, 2012). It emerged as an alternative system of knowledge production by challenging the premise of conventional social science research methodology – instead recognising the value of participants as researchers rather than objects of research. The underlying premise of participatory research is that 'ordinary' people are knowledgeable about their social realities and are able to articulate this knowledge (Bergold, 2007). The motivation to initiate participatory research may emerge for various reasons; Pant (2012) suggests that participatory research can be initiated in situations where people are already aware of a problem and awareness is raised. Concerns regarding the poor educational attainment of LAC has gained increasing awareness, yet few studies have sought to explore these concerns using participatory methods. Considering this, this thesis intended to promote the participation of LAC in the development of the study by taking account the views and experiences of the young people so that they would help to shape the recommendations of this current thesis; for example, young people were given a choice over the interview arrangements – factors such as when and where interviews took place and who was present; are factors that are likely to influence what young people will talk about (Thomas et al, 1998). The involvement of people living the reality of that problem, even if it begins with an external push, is a necessary element of the participatory research process (Pant, 2012).

3.2.1 Philosophical approach

An ontological assumption refers to the way in which individuals understand and interpret reality. This current thesis adopts the philosophy that an individual's reality and experiences are subjective and in order to understand these subjective experiences, it is important to explore the relationship between the objective world and subjective experience (Houston, 2010). The philosophical approach adopted by the Doctorate Course at the Institute of Education and integral to this current thesis is Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Eco-Systemic Model of Development. Central to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory is the interrelatedness of individuals within the developmental context; individuals actively take part in the creation of their perceived reality, an ongoing, dynamic process, wherein people act on their interpretations and their knowledge of the world. Hence, the ontological outlook of this current thesis is that the views and experiences of individuals encapsulate their perception of reality (Willig, 2001).

3.2.2 Epistemological approach

The epistemological approach of this current thesis was social constructionist. Burr (2003) suggests that a constructivist approach views the interactions between people, primarily through the use of language, as an essential component to gaining an understanding of the world. Social constructionism is based on the notion that individuals seek to gain knowledge about the world and that this knowledge is based on the subjective interpretations of their experiences and will be diverse and multiple. The value attributed to the opinions and views of the participants will influence the extent to which such an approach has an impact on a qualitative study (Creswell, 2007). In this vein, this current thesis aimed to consider a broader and more in-depth account of the educational experiences of young people from a care background, at the end of the care experience and care leavers, with a view to gaining a more conceptual representation and understanding of their experiences. It is through this process of exploring the views and experiences of these young people that a greater and richer understanding of the educational needs of LAC can be achieved. Furthermore, the study sought to promote the participation of young people and therefore looked to embrace a participatory research approach. The aim was to hear the voices of the young people and ensure that their views and opinions were valued and considered. Hart's ladder of children's participation (1992) distinguishes possible types of adult–child interaction represented in participatory practice; this is represented in his eight rung model. This thesis reflects between level 5 and 6 on Hart's participatory ladder. While the idea for this thesis was

initiated and developed by the researcher, young people were consulted about the thesis during a number of 'drop-in' sessions; this process enabled the participants to orientate the researcher to key topics, based on their life experiences, which contributed towards the shaping of the design in the early stages and the initial designing of the interview schedule. Moreover, young people in this current thesis were able to direct the course of the interviews within the overall themes and were involved in influencing the direction of the research. This informal process of participation yielded equally valuable information; young people were made aware that their views and opinions would be taken into account and that these views would help to structure the researcher thinking and ideas and shape the recommendations of this current thesis .

3.2.3 A Qualitative Methodology

Cresswell (2007) asserts that the purpose of qualitative research is to understand and represent the experiences and actions of people as they encounter, engage and live through situations. In qualitative research, the researcher attempts to develop understandings of the phenomena under study, based as much as possible on the perspectives of those being studied (Henwood and Pigeon, 1992). Given the sensitive nature of the research – many of the participants will have experienced unsettling moves and life challenges – it was felt that a qualitative approach should be adopted, in order that the experiences, perceptions and actions of participants within the study are understood effectively. In this vein, the data gathered will provide meaningful and useful answers to the question that motivates this research. Unlike quantitative research, which can "inappropriately fix meaning where these are variable and renegotiable in relation to their context of use" (Henwood et al, 1992, p17), this qualitative research will consider the uniqueness and particularity of human experience, specifically relevant to the type and nature of this group of individuals. Moreover, Davies and Wright (2008) note that relatively under researched areas of study can benefit from qualitative based approaches, as they provide rich descriptions of phenomena that can be used for hypothesis generation alongside larger, quantitative studies.

3.2.4 Perspective of researcher

As the author of this current thesis, I am conscious of the impact that my views and perceptions will have had on the different stages and levels of this current thesis. Hence, considering the potential for researcher bias, I have endeavoured to be transparent about the process of research and have worked closely with my research supervisors, to gain alternative perspectives and viewpoints about the research design, approach taken and data collected.

An example of how I considered the impact of my role on the research was during the data collection process. Before carrying out the interviews, I made use of the skills and experiences I have acquired as a TEP in my approach to working with LAC. Previous research refers to the difficult and unsettling experiences of many LAC, it was therefore essential that I assumed a sensitive approach when working with this group; being respectful and appreciative and the importance of building rapport.

When working with LAC, it was important that I consider the potential differences between their views and experiences and mine and the effect that this might have on my interpretation of the interview data. Hence, I ensured that the length and detail of the interviews were sufficient, that is, I continued until I felt confident that the interviewees had nothing further to contribute; this was in order to increase the likelihood of a valid interpretation of the data (Greig and Taylor, 1999). Further detail regarding the interview process will be explored later in the chapter.

3.3 Procedure

The study was divided into two stages. Stage one involved exploring the provision available for young people from a care background in both boroughs and building relationships with young people who accessed the Leaving Care Service and Virtual School. Stage two was concerned with the research design, recruitment of participants, a consideration of the ethical issues, designing the interview schedule, collecting data and interpreting the data using a thematic analysis approach. It is well documented that it is often difficult to gain access to this group of young people (Murray, 2005) and this was noted during the first

meeting with the LA; consequently, this was given consideration when devising the research design. The next section will explore the key features of these stages.

3.3.1 Stage one

In order to gain an understanding of the young person's social world, through the use of exploratory methods of data collection, it was important, initially, that the researcher develop a relationship with the young people; this was to ensure that they feel relaxed and comfortable to share their views and experiences. Participatory research requires a great willingness on the part of the participants to disclose their personal views and experiences. Such openness is displayed towards close friends and family, although rarely towards strangers. Christensen (2004) highlights the value of a researcher familiarising themselves with the particulars of the young people's social environments. Moreover, Bergold et al (2012) emphasises the importance of creating a 'safe space' in order to facilitate openness between the participants and the researcher.

Moreover, as access to a sample of young people was largely dependent upon the good will of members of staff within the Virtual Schools and Leaving Care Services (see section on obtaining consent from the Boroughs), it was essential to develop relationships with team members). Hence, Stage One involved becoming familiar with the workings of the Virtual School and the Leaving Care Service and building relationships with the young people who attended the Centres for social events; in Borough 1 this was based at the Leaving Care Service, in Borough 2 this was based at the offices of the Virtual School.

With the support of the Head of the Leaving Care Service in Borough 1, the researcher was able to attend a regular 'drop-in' for young people in care and post care, on alternate Thursdays, during the period of September 2010 – December 2010. During the 'drop-in' sessions the young people would come to socialise and talk with members of staff. The researcher's attendance at these gatherings provided an opportunity to become acquainted with some of the young people and enabled them to become familiar with the researcher, resulting in them feeling more relaxed and comfortable. Opportunities for meeting young people from a care background in Borough 2 were more challenging, as there were no regular organised social gatherings. However, young people both in care and post care were invited to attend the offices of the Virtual School to meet with members of staff on Monday and/or Tuesday mornings should they have any concerns, or need to seek information or support. Following a discussion with the Head of the Virtual School in Borough 2, the

researcher was invited to meet some of the young people attending the offices on a Tuesday morning in May 2012. This was a useful activity, as it allowed the researcher to become familiar with some of the young people, which in turn, enabled them to feel more at ease with the researcher and consider being involved in the next stage of the study.

3.3.2 Stage two

3.3.2.1 Method of data collection

Significant consideration was given when selecting the most appropriate tool for eliciting the in-depth views and experiences of young people from a care background. Semi-structured interviews were judged to be the most suitable research tool for generating rich qualitative data; enabling the researcher to gain a real understanding of their lives and experiences and learn, first hand, about the social world of the interviewees (Smith, 1995). Providing the young people with the opportunity to talk freely and openly, elicits this insight (Robson, 2002).

A further advantage of semi-structured interviews is the flexibility in its approach; interview questions can be pre-planned, questions can be re-worded where necessary, further explanation can be provided and topic areas can be explored in greater detail (Bell, 2005). Furthermore, given the significance of establishing a familiarity between the researcher and the young people, the opportunity provided by semi-structured interviews to empathise with participants social and psychological worlds (Smith and Osborn, 2003) was a further advantage of using this tool. In social research, semi-structured interviews are commonly used for the recording and analysis of the informant's subjective perspectives (Hopf, 2004); this approach supported the theoretical position of this current thesis and was flexible and sensitive to the social context (Mason, 1996).

Possible drawbacks of using semi-structured interviews were noted. For example, they are time consuming with regards to their administration and transcription (Smith and Osborn, 2003). Moreover, the information obtained can be difficult to analyse and may lack reliability (Robson, 2002). Conducting semi-structured interviews with vulnerable groups of young people can also be challenging; for example, young people may be unwilling to disclose sensitive and personal information in an interview situation and with a person who is both a stranger and senior in age (Hill, 1997). Notwithstanding these disadvantages, the researcher considered that it was possible to address these issues by building rapport with the young

people and in viewing them as experts (in order to manage the power imbalance between the researcher and young person) (Hill, 2010).

The use of alternative data collection techniques were also considered, such as focus groups and questionnaires. With regards to questionnaires, the researcher considered them to be inappropriate as they would not be able to extract the level of depth that semi-structured interviews provide. While questionnaires do have their advantages, for example they are less time consuming and have the potential for uncovering a number of significant themes in the experiences of young people (Hill, 2010), the use of semi-structured interviews provided the opportunity to explore in-depth many of the points of interest that would not be possible to do with questionnaires.

Initially it was hoped that focus groups would be used for generating data in this current thesis. Evidence has demonstrated that focus groups are particularly useful for exploratory research when rather little is known about the phenomenon of interest (Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook, 2007). Moreover, focus groups are often used for generating hypotheses, which can be further explored at a later date to develop new ideas and concepts and to generate impressions of topics of interest (Bellenger et al, 1976). Given the exploratory nature of the study and the lack of research in this area (Jacklin et al, 2006), the researcher felt that focus groups would be ideal.

However, focus groups proved extremely difficult to organise with a high rate of non-attendance amongst the young people (a number of pilot focus groups had been planned for June 2010 but it was not possible for any to go ahead due to poor-attendance and a very limited number of participants). Moreover, due to the sensitive nature of the study, one-to-one explorations were deemed more suitable. All things considered and for the purposes of this current thesis, semi-structured interviews were regarded as the most appropriate data collection method for eliciting in-depth information from a relatively small sample of young people.

As previously noted, semi-structured interviews have been criticised for their lack of reliability. Therefore questions were planned to be open and neutral, as Smith (1995) suggests this increases the reliability of a study, and the language used was clear and concise, so to reduce the differences in interpretation of the questions by the participants (Kumar, 1999). Supervision was used to support this. The validity of questioning was also improved by ensuring that the questions were relevant and additional questions were asked to clarify understanding, obtain additional information and provide an opportunity for new

themes to emerge. Due to the small sample of potential participants (see below), one participant was used to pilot the interview schedule. The piloting of questions further ensured that questions were delivered at an appropriate pace and tone and that terms and phrases were understood.

Young people who agreed to be interviewed were able to choose whether they wanted to be interviewed alone or with someone else present (i.e. their social worker or friend). Given the sensitive nature of the research, it was vital that young people felt as relaxed and comfortable as possible. As a result, young people were given a choice of where they would prefer the interview to take place. Choices of location varied; while most interviews took place at the Leaving Care Service or Virtual School, as this was a familiar place for them, some chose to be interviewed at school as this suited their daytime schedule; telephone interviews were also provided (particularly for young people who lived further away). By offering young people a choice of where the interviews took place, it was hoped that they would feel more comfortable (Wengraf, 2001) and consequently, the interview would better reflect their views and opinions, thus providing greater ecological validity. Ecological validity is the extent to which information derived from research reflects a real-life situation (Brewer, 2000).

3.3.2.2 Designing the interview schedule

The questions included in the interview schedule were based on various topic headings, derived from the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 (see Appendix I for the full interview schedule). This enabled the researcher to introduce topics purposefully to participants (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Topic areas included: Care history (including number of home and school moves), attitude and motivation towards learning pre- and during care, expectations of oneself and others expectations with regards to school and learning, what helped/hindered learning and school experience, significant adults, the impact of school and educational experience on moving to independence and further education, what could be done to improve things for young people in care. When designing the interview schedule, it was necessary to include a number of probe questions, so as to draw out more detailed and richer information from the young people, whilst also encouraging them to elaborate on points made. Interviews lasted approximately one hour. Recording the interviews allowed for a more thorough analysis, as they were later transcribed (Bell, 2005). (For further details regarding the interview schedule see Appendix V)

3.4 Participants

3.4.1 Inclusion criteria

Recognising the difficulties gaining access to this group of young people (Heptinstall, 2000), participants invited to take part in the study were young people who had been in the care of the state for at least one year; the study welcomed participants who had experienced care placements within the Boroughs and outside the Boroughs. Young people who were currently in care, in their final year of compulsory school (Year 11) and care leavers were eligible to take part in the study. The identification of a minimum time in care was essential to ensure that young people had sufficient experience on which to reflect on during the interview process.

3.4.2 Advantages of accessing two different populations

The sample consisted of young people currently in their last year of compulsory schooling and still in care, and care leavers up to the age of 24. This was considered as advantageous for various reasons, for example, access to a wider sample of young people meant that it would be possible for the study to generate a broader range of perspectives; opportunities to compare themes that emerged from the interviews of those in care and care leavers; the inclusion of two groups of young people would add richness to the study's data; EPs are now working with children and young people up to 25, hence it was viewed as an appropriate age range. Moreover, the possibility of triangulating sources of information would also increase the study's validity. Bogdan and Biklen, (2006) note that triangulation of data is a process of verifying information from more than one source. Finally, should the views of one group be supported by those in the other group, then greater prominence could be attributed to the emerging themes. Disadvantages included; the accounts of care leavers may be less vivid than those still in care, as they were required to recall experiences from several years previous.

3.4.3 The process of selection

It was the intention that participants would be recruited from two distinct groups, in two Boroughs; care leavers (supported by the Leaving Care Service) and those still in care and in the final year of compulsory schooling (supported by the Virtual School). Exact figures for

these categories do not exist, however, the best estimates are; in borough 1 there were 40 care leavers aged between 19-21, with whom the borough were still in touch and in borough 2 there were 15 care leavers. For those still in care aged 16 and over there were under 100 in both boroughs (DfE, 2014). However, due to a number of factors, it was not possible to invite all the young people from these groups. For example, the contact details for many of the young people in the care leavers group were incorrect and it was therefore not possible to locate them. Two young people, one still in care and one care leaver, said that they did not want to take part, despite expressing an interest initially and many young people did not attend their arranged interviews on more than one occasion. Moreover, I was asked by the Head of the Virtual School in Borough 1 not to approach two young people due to their traumatic life experiences, as she felt it would be too painful for them to take part.

Table A: Total numbers of LAC in boroughs 1 and 2

	In care	Care leavers
Borough 1	90	40
Borough 2	45	15[1]

3.4.4 Inviting young people in care to take part

A list of six young people in care from Borough 1 and two young people in care from Borough 2 were provided by the Heads of the Virtual School. The researcher had limited access to the registers by the Heads of the Virtual School (this was to protect the identity of the young people). In negotiation with the Heads of the Virtual School, letters would be sent by the researcher to the young people's carer and social worker (identified by the Heads of the Virtual School as being suitable potential participants) giving details about the project and noting the researcher's intention to contact the young person, in order to seek their involvement. Previous research has highlighted the difficulties of accessing LAC to take part in research. With this in mind, the researcher considered it appropriate to include an opt-out-clause in the letter, which stated that should the carer or social worker be opposed to the researcher approaching the young person, they should contact the researcher or the Head of the Virtual School (contact details for both were included in the letter). Furthermore the letter stated that should no contact be made by either the carer or social worker, then the assumption would be made that they were happy for the young person to be approached.

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[1] The number of children are approximates

Included with the letter was an information sheet for young people (see Appendix II for a copy of the information sheet). Carers/social workers were encouraged to read the information sheets with the young person.

3.4.5 Inviting care leavers to take part

As care leavers were over the age of 16, it was not necessary to gain consent from a social worker or carer; instead informed consent was obtained from the young people (as per the 'Gillick' principle[2]).

A list of five care leavers from Borough 1 and two care leavers from Borough 2 was provided by the Heads of the Leaving Care Service. Much of the contact information on the lists was missing, which consequently had an immediate effect on the number of potential participants. The Head of the Leaving Care Service in Borough 1, however did state that it might be possible to meet and recruit further participants at the 'drop-in' (held at the Leaving Care Service). In negotiation with the Heads of the Leaving Care Service, it was agreed that letters would be sent out to care leavers (identified by the Heads of the Leaving Care Service as being suitable potential participants) detailing the nature of the project and inviting them to participate. Information sheets about the study were also included. Care leavers were informed in the letters that the researcher would be contacting them by telephone a week after the letter had been sent out, to establish whether they would be interested in taking part in the study.

3.4.6 Sample size

As the boroughs had small numbers of LAC that I was able to contact, it was apparent that the sample would be small; this was also due to the difficulties in recruiting participants – (which is not unusual with populations such as this, who are difficult to access. Hence, whilst the sample was small it is not uncharacteristic of research in this field (Murray, 2005)). Of the letters of invitation sent out to social workers/foster carers, three responded positively and one declined. Of those sent out to care leavers, only one responded and agreed to take part. The researcher was aware that such a small sample would have implications for the validity of the study. Concerns included: the degree to which a small sample would be

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[2] Source: Gillick v. West Norfolk and Wisbech Area Health Authority [1985] AC 112

representative of a wider population of young people from a care background in both Boroughs and whether a small number of participants would limit the level of in-depth analysis required.

Due to the difficulties of recruiting participants, the researcher was required to use opportunity sampling to aid recruitment. Opportunistic sampling often leads to sample bias – it is important to note that this current thesis' participants' are uncharacteristically involved in education. Further contact was made with managers of services, creating opportunities and following leads (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Opportunities to talk to some of the young people at the Leaving Care Service, in Borough 1, during drop-in sessions and as they waited in the reception area for meetings with service providers and social workers, were utilized. On these occasions, the researcher was able to talk to the young people about the project and asked whether they would be interested in taking part. For those who expressed an interest, information sheets were provided and interview times arranged at a convenient location.

Table B: The recruitment of participants

	Numbers of care leavers provided by Head of LC Service	Numbers of in care young people provided by VSH	Numbers of young people who agreed to take part from the original selection (left)	Opportunity sampling
Borough 1	5	6	1	6
Borough 2	2	2	2	1

Of the 22 potential participants (numbers of participants provided by the VSH and LC service and opportunistic sampling) initially identified, ten took part in the study. Considering the high numbers of young people who chose not to participate, due to limited access by social workers and Heads of Service, the potential for sample bias needs to be addressed; this was particularly relevant for young people in care (as care leavers were considered old enough to approach without the consent of their social worker). Moreover, due to the difficulties of recruiting participants, the researcher was required to use opportunity sampling, in the hope of recruiting more participants. Opportunistic sampling often leads to sample bias – it is important to note that the participants' are more involved in education.

3.4.7 Participant descriptors

Of the young people who agreed to take part in the study, three were currently in care and seven were care leavers. Young people ranged in age from 16 to 24. Five were male and five were female. Five were White British, one was Black African, one Afro-Caribbean and one mixed White British and Black Caribbean; the sample also included two young people seeking asylum (one Black African and one Vietnamese).

It is important to note that the two young people in the sample who entered the care system as asylum seekers, will have gone through markedly different educational journeys and experiences from those young people brought up in the UK. Both of these young people entered the care system later – one was 14 and the other 15. As a result of their differences in life history and care status, it is likely that this will have influenced their care experience, educational and life outcomes.

The recruitment of participants for this current thesis was identified as follows: Three were identified from a list of potential participants provided by the LA, two of whom the researcher was able to link with during the first stage of the study. The remaining seven were approached using opportunity sampling.

Table C: Participant details (pseudonyms have been used in order to ensure young people's anonymity)

Name	Gender	Age	Care status	Age at entry to care	Age left foster/residential care
Maggie	F	17yrs	In care	4 years	In care
Brenda	F	16yrs	In care	8 yrs	In care
Ray	M	16yrs	In care	1 yrs	In care
Phil	M	20yrs	Care leaver	15 yrs	20 years
Rachel	F	19yrs	Care leaver	10 yrs	18 years
Chris	M	24yrs	Care leaver	15 yrs	21 years
Kathy	F	21yrs	Care leaver	13 yrs	17 years

Richard	M	18yrs	Care leaver	10 years	18 years
Jacob	M	19yrs	Care leaver	15 years	18 years
Harriet	F	23yrs	Care leaver	15 years	18 years

Young people aged 18+ where no longer in care and considered care leavers.

3.5 Interview process

At the start of the interview process, the researcher introduced the study to the interviewees. The young people were given a copy of the participation agreement (see Appendix III for an example of the agreement) to read and sign, to consent their participation. Young people were also given an information sheet about the study to read and an opportunity to ask questions about the project and interview process was provided. Participants were reminded that the interviews would be kept confidential and their identity anonymous; their right to withdraw from the study at any point and that recording and transcripts from the interview would be stored securely[3]. They were made aware that The Head of the Leaving Care Service (Borough 1) and the Head of the Virtual School (Borough 2) would be available, should they wish to speak further about any of the issues arising from the interview. All interviews were recorded and lasted between 40 and 90 minutes.

At the end of the interview young people were given the opportunity to ask questions and make further comments about the study and their involvement in it. Moreover, they were asked to give feedback on their experience of being interviewed; this was also an opportunity for the researcher to remind young people of their option to speak further to the Head of the Leaving Care Service/Head of the Virtual School about any of the issues arising from the interview process.

3.6 Method of analysis: Thematic Analysis

A thematic analysis approach was adopted as a method for identifying, analysing and reporting repeated patterns of meaning (themes) within the interviews. Thematic analysis as

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[3] Hard data (including print outs of transcripts) was locked in a secure cupboard in the researcher's house. All electronic data (including transcript filed and interview recordings) was stored securely on the researcher's laptop. Files were also double password protected. Following the thesis examination process, all hard data will be destroyed and electronic data permanently deleted. These actions are in accordance with the Data protection Act 1998.

described by Braun and Clarke (2006) is "a flexible and useful research tool" (p.78). It is based on the principle of subjecting data to qualitative analysis for the purpose of identifying commonly recurring themes (Braun et al, 2006). The researcher considered thematic analysis to be more appropriate than other forms of analysis such as Interpretative Phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA is an idiographic method, which is used to identify individual difference. As this current thesis was interested in exploring the themes across the responses of young people from a care background, IPA was considered unsuitable.

Braun and Clarke (2013) note that thematic analysis is a flexible approach, compatible with a range of epistemological positions. It is viewed as an effective method of analysing and detailing the views and experiences of participants and the meanings attached to those experiences. Thematic analysis was therefore considered to be compatible with the epistemological approach of this current thesis (Willig, 1999). Moreover, whilst allowing for unexpected data to emerge, it is also able to consider the findings from previous research (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

An inductive approach to thematic analysis was adopted for this current thesis, allowing for the emergence of new themes, whilst also taking into account the social contexts and contextual influences on the accounts provided by the young people (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis has previously been recommended as suited to researchers relatively new to qualitative investigation (Braun et al, 2013).

3.6.1 Process of analysis

Thematic analysis was applied to the data in the following manner (Table D documents how I implemented the phases) as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) in their 'Phase Description of the Process of Thematic Analysis'.

Table D: Process of thematic analysis

Braun & Clarke's phases of thematic analysis	Description of my implementation of the thematic analysis phases
1. Familiarisation with data	Following the interviews, each was listened to again to become more familiar with the data. The transcripts were then read and re-read, noting down initial ideas which would later support the process of code generation.
2. Generation of initial codes	Significant features of the data were coded in a systematic manner across the data set and data relevant to each code was collated. For example, the following extract was coded for 'an encouraging and supportive relationship with a foster carer': *"My foster mother was always there for me...she cared about me and wanted me to do well. She would always push me and told me I could do well in school".* (Maggie, in care,17) A further extract was coded for the 'lack of support and encouragement from social services'. *"Yeah, it did but…like I could have done my level two a long time ago, do you know what I mean? I could have done it before I even thought about my son like, do you know what I mean? Like…these guys here didn't push no-one forward to do anything like that".* (Kathy, care leaver, 21yrs) Another extract was coded for 'low expectations by school' *"I don't know, they had some doubts that I wouldn't do well in my schooling"* (Rachel, care leaver, 19yrs)
3. Searching for themes	Codes were reviewed and grouped into potential themes and sub-themes, gathering all data relevant for each potential theme.

	Main recurrent themes were selected which reflected a group of codes.
4. Reviewing themes	The themes were reviewed to check that they worked in relation on two levels: to the coded extracts and to the entire data set. A 'thematic map' of the analysis was generated. Supervision and colleague support was used to offer alternative explanations and labels. Codes and themes were continually reviewed.
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis of the themes was conducted to define the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis told. Supervision was used to explore alternative interpretations of the data and support the selection of themes that encompassed the codes and would lose their meaning if changed. Clear definitions and names for the themes were generated. The number of participants reflected in the codes were re-checked and stated.
6. Producing the reports	Vivid and compelling extract examples were selected and the final analysis of selected extracts was made; supervision was used to support the choice of selected extracts and check codes. Themes were reviewed. The final analysis was reported and related back to the research questions and literature.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Given the sensitive nature of this current thesis and sample of young people, it was even more important to adhere to the ethical guidelines detailed below. As young people from a care background are viewed as one of the most vulnerable groups in society, it was vital that this remain at the forefront of the researcher's mind. The following section will describe the

ethical issues considered in this current thesis and will detail the stages of obtaining ethical approval.

3.7.1 Ethical issues

When developing the research design, the researcher considered the guidelines outlined by the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics. Policies of both Boroughs and requirements stipulated by the Data Protection Act (1998) were also followed. A detailed proposal of the study was made to the Institute of Education Faculty Research Ethics Committee to obtain ethical approval (March 2009). As the study involved working with a vulnerable group of young people, the application highlighted the importance of gaining informed consent from participants (and in the case of minors from their social worker/foster carer), in addition to providing them with detailed information about the study; this was to ensure that they had a complete understanding of how they would be contributing to the research. Furthermore the application stressed the participant's right to withdraw from the study at any time; details on confidentiality, anonymity and the storage of data were also included. An opportunity to talk through the information sheet again was had and young people were informed that whilst confidentiality would be maintained, should they disclose an issue relating to their safety or safeguarding issues that i would have a duty to act upon this data by informing their social worker and/or safeguarding officer. The participant's voice recorded transcriptions were stored on a password protected computer and were deleted after coding was completed. Munro (2001) notes that young people value the importance of confidentiality, yet also stresses the need to inform them that information revealed during the interview process that may be harmful to the participants or others, would be forwarded on to the Head of the Virtual School and Head of the Leaving Care Service. In such situations, the benefits of protecting participants' safety far outweigh the cost of participants' reluctance to confide in the researcher. In cases where information revealed related to previous experiences of harm to themselves or others; for example one young person revealed that he "used to head butt walls" when he got angry, a discussion was held with relevant professionals (the Head Teacher and the Head of the Virtual School) in order to confirm that that the participant or others were no longer at risk of harm. Whilst it is unlikely that direct involvement in the research will have resulted in any discomfort, participants were given the opportunity to break or terminate the interview should they feel distressed. Finally, time was also allocated post-interview to debrief the participants and ensure that concerns were addressed and questions answered.

The application also highlighted the importance of the researcher working in a sensitive manner and providing young people with a point of contact should they wish to discuss any of the issues raised during the study process (the Head of the Leaving Care Service in Borough 1 and the Head of the Virtual School in Borough 2, agreed to be available). Protection from harm is a critical component of any piece of research practice. Indeed, it was important that the researcher be mindful of the possibility that the young people may become emotional and upset as a result of discussion of their experiences.

3.7.2 Obtaining consent from Boroughs 1 and 2

As a TEP, the researcher was required to seek support from senior managers to gain access to young people. Following a number of discussions held between the researcher and the managers of the Virtual School and Leaving Care Service, it was agreed that the study could go ahead. The Manager of the Virtual School in Borough 1 had some concerns regarding the involvement of particular individuals, for example, it was believed that participation in the study would be too painful for some young people, as a result of their traumatic life experiences. Consequently, it was agreed that participation in the study, for those young people still in care, would be at the discretion of the Manager of the Virtual School. This had significant implications for the sample of participants, but also with regards to the participatory rights of the young people. Kendrick et al. (2008) highlight the issue of 'gatekeepers' when exploring the difficulties of conducting research with LAC. Whilst gatekeepers can have a protective function, Masson (2002) asserts that their behaviour, as a consequence, censors the views of young people, thus undermining their participatory rights. Heptinstall (2000) further raises concerns regarding gatekeepers' ability to block participation, subsequently limiting children's participation in research.

3.7.3 Informed consent

Hill (2010) argues that consent should be attained, where possible, from participants themselves. However, for young people under the age of 16, informed consent was required from 'protectors', such as their carer and/or social worker. For those under the age of 16, it was vital that they be involved in the process of gaining informed consent. Hence, to ensure their involvement in this process, the researcher and the Head of the Virtual School spoke with the young person about the research prior to commencing the interviews. The purpose of this was to ensure that they had a clear understanding of their potential involvement in the study and the requirements of the interview. Masson (2002) notes, that young people often have difficulty withdrawing from an activity that has been organised for them by a significant adult. Hence, the researcher strived to provide the young people with as much information as possible, in the hope that they would be able to exercise autonomy about whether to partake in the study. Young people were provided with an information sheet about the project and informal discussions were held, to ensure-that they were fully informed.

4.0 Results

4.1 Thematic analysis

Chapter three detailed the process of carrying out thematic analysis on the interview transcripts. Themes and corresponding subthemes were identified; these related to the view and perspectives of the young people within the sample.

Grouping data for analysis was checked. Comparisons were made across themes within samples (for example, comparing unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) vs. non and young people in care vs. care leavers) to ensure that all relevant material was categorised appropriately, and that there was no duplication of meaning. A compare and contrast approach was then carried out to highlight any differences between the young people in care and care leavers, and between unaccompanied asylum seekers. However, both were discounted for the following reasons: As there were only two UASC in the sample it was not possible to generalise the findings and due to the similarities between themes generated from those in care and care leavers a decision was made not to present them as contrasting groups.

The following chapter presents a description of each theme and its corresponding subthemes; quotes from the original transcripts will be provided, in order to illustrate the various points. Finally suggestions, provided by the young people, of how educating children and young people in care could be improved, will be discussed.

Figure 1: An illustration of the four main themes

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                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │   Theme 1:      │
                    │   Personal      │
                    │ characteristics │
                    └────────┬────────┘
                             │
┌──────────────┐    ╭────────┴────────────────╮    ┌──────────────┐
│  Theme 4:    │    │  Factors that support   │    │  Theme 2:    │
│ Negotiating  │────│  or hinder the          │────│  Responses   │
│ challenging  │    │  educational experiences│    │  to life     │
│ systems      │    │  of young people from a │    │  events      │
└──────────────┘    │  public care background │    └──────────────┘
                    ╰────────┬────────────────╯
                             │
                    ┌────────┴────────┐
                    │   Theme 3:      │
                    │   Supportive    │
                    │   contexts      │
                    └─────────────────┘
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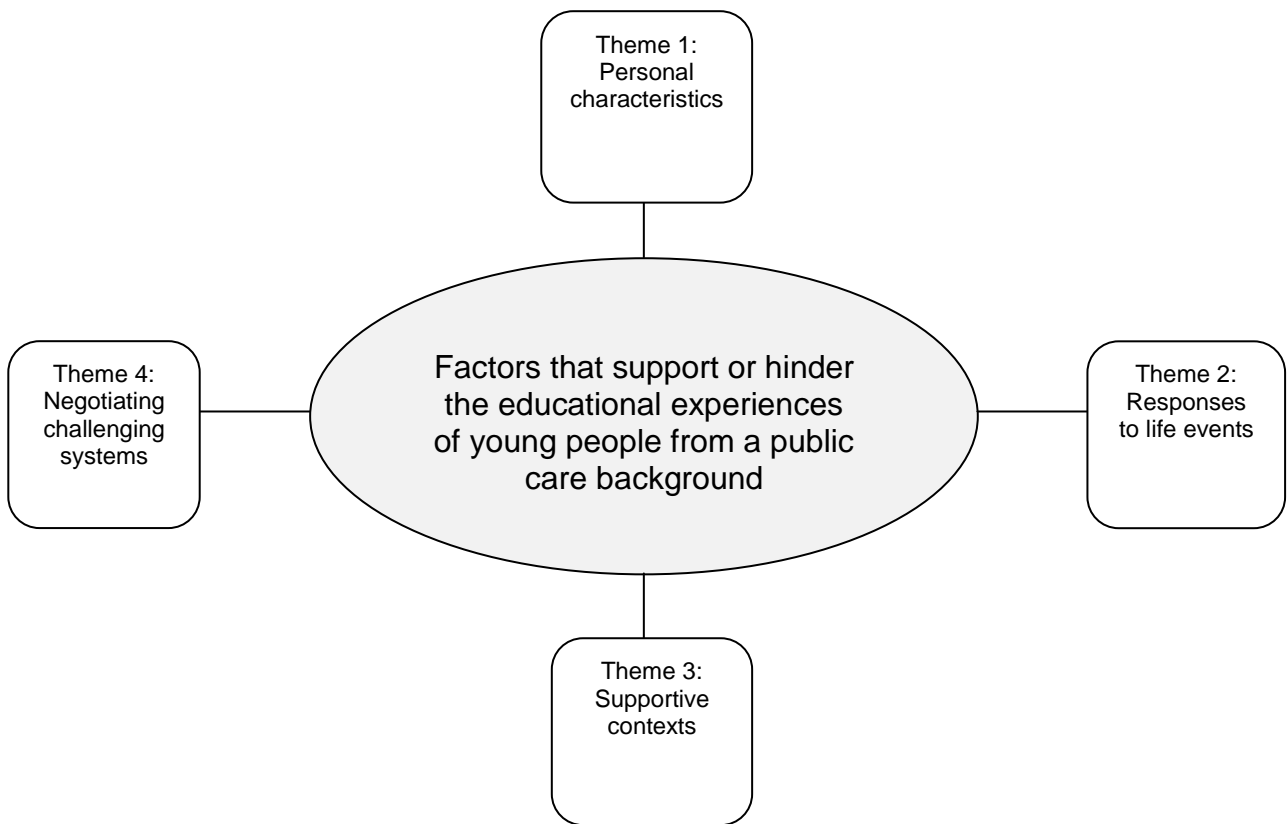
The four main themes and corresponding subthemes are detailed below in Table E.

Table E: Themes and subthemes

Themes	*Subthemes*
Personal Characteristics	*Self-motivation*
	Resilience and self-reliance
	Loneliness
Responses to life events	*Rejection*
	Externalising vs internalising behaviour
	Turning points
	Fragmented memory

Supportive contexts	*Post compulsory education/employment*
	Positive relationships
	Hobbies and outside interests
	Value of education
Negotiating challenging systems	*Challenging systems*
	Life experience impacting on education
	Difficult relationships
	Stability vs instability
	Absence from school
	Lack of discipline
	Influence of the corporate parent

4.2 Theme one: Personal characteristics

It became clear when analysing the accounts, that many of the young people demonstrated strong personal characteristics and qualities, which appeared to impact and shape their behaviours, ability to cope with adversity and the challenges of growing up in care. Consequently, many of these characteristics had a significant bearing on young people's ability to access and succeed educationally, having to assume many of the responsibilities of adulthood at a relatively young age. Unsurprisingly, those young people demonstrating positive personal qualities and a 'can do' attitude towards life and decision making, were more likely to have positive educational outcomes, in comparison to those who faced negative experiences and/or displayed negative behaviours and characteristics.

Figure 2: Thematic map illustrating theme one and corresponding subthemes

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┌──────────────┐                              ┌──────────────┐
│ Subtheme 1c: │          ⬭ Personal          │ Subtheme 1b: │
│  Loneliness  │────────⬭  Characteristics ⬭──│ Resilience and│
│              │          ⬭                   │ self-reliance │
└──────────────┘              │               └──────────────┘
                              │
                      ┌──────────────┐
                      │ Subtheme 1a: │
                      │Self-motivation,│
                      │     high      │
                      │  expectations │
                      │      and      │
                      │ determination │
                      └──────────────┘
```
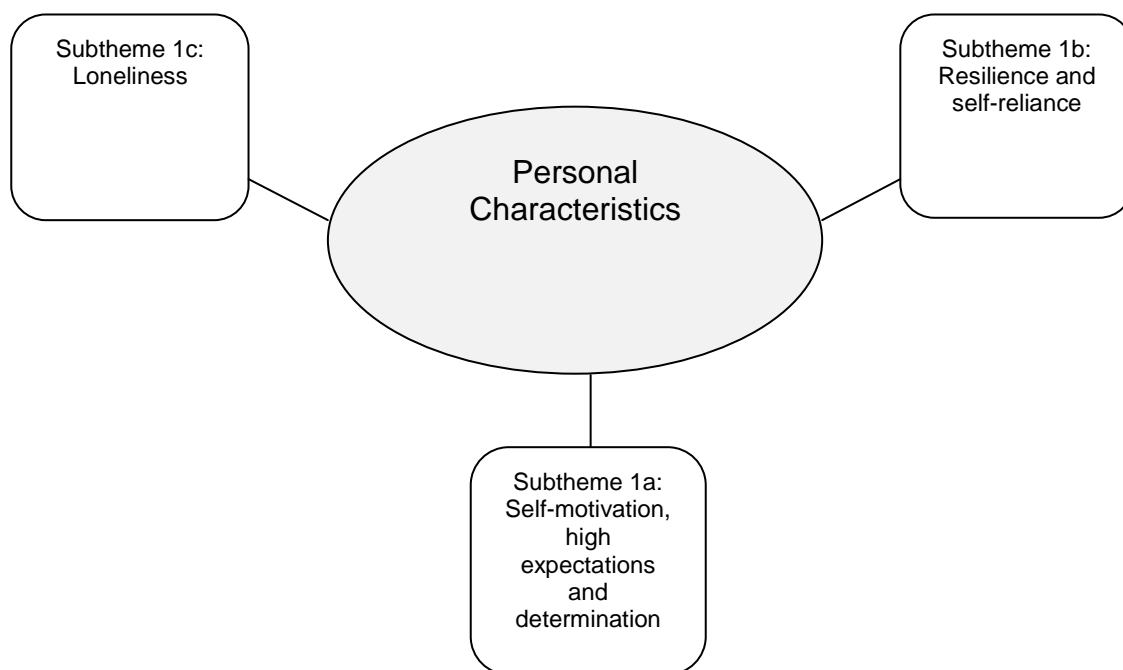
4.2.1 Self-motivation, high expectations of self, determination

Three of the young people expressed a desire to succeed both educationally and in future employment. The driving factor for some was self-motivation and a 'need' to achieve. Harriet, a care leaver, made reference to an internal drive and determination to do one's best.

"I don't think it came from any person. If you really want to do it then you will do it and when you are motivated yourself, if you do not want to help yourself then no-one will help you... you have to try your best…when I do something I just do it well or don't do it at all. That's what I think but in real life experience tells you whether it is true or not....whether I do succeed or not I don't know but at least I try."   Harriet (care leaver, 23)

Similarly Chris, a care leaver, spoke of his struggle to access his learning and the constant strive to improve academically.

"so every day I would leave the house at half six, catch two buses to school, it was decided that I'd stay in the same school…so I'd take two buses to school, one way, four buses in total, go and do a full day at school and then come back and do two hours of private tuition with…my maths or my English teacher and then have some food and go to bed and do that and I did that for a whole year."   Chris (care leaver, 24)

"I'll be twenty-five in April and I'm aiming for at least a 2:1 in my degree and…I'm now in my last semester of my last year and I'm getting high firsts and the only reason I do that is because I push myself so hard…when I got a… 2:1 at the beginning of my third year I was absolutely…not distraught, but I went and made an issue about it to my lecturer because I, you know, if a first is there then why not get it?"   Chris (care leaver, 24)

Two young people referred to external factors, such as family members, driving their success.

"My son...he made me stick it out... I've got to…I don't want to be on benefits for the rest of my life and… I don't want him to want or need for anything…And being on benefits he's gonna always need isn't' he?"   Kathy (care leaver, 21)

Phil described the value of having role models to aspire to.

"...I really want to go to like X university, it's a top university and like I've got family who's gone there and they've got good jobs now like one of my mum's cousins…he works for X as a director, he went to X, the other one went to X, he's working in…an investment banker now, they're both doing really well and I look at that as like a benchmark, that if they can do it, why can't I do it?"   Phil (in care, 20)

4.2.2 Resilience and self-reliance

Closely related to the subject of self-motivation and the drive to achieve, is the subtheme, apparent in many of the young people's accounts, the notion of resilience and self-reliance. Some of them spoke of the challenging and difficult situations they experienced whilst growing up in care; in many cases these young people had to find ways of overcoming their challenges, support themselves emotionally and move forward.

One young person spoke openly about the difficulties he faced before coming into care; the constant need to rely on oneself and the belief that change is possible is projected through his story.

"when I was collecting drugs for my mum…or when I was you know, doing shoplifting, all these horrible things, I just knew it was wrong and that enabled me all the way through, for fifteen years of my life to very easily know what was right and what was wrong and not to lose…the path really because you know, I should statistically, I should be beating my wife, I should be living in a flat with you know…on benefits…but you know, I've changed all that because somehow I knew that there was something better and that this was wrong and that…it wasn't right, that what I was going through and why nobody else was there to support me…"   Chris (care leaver, 24)

Young people also highlighted the unavoidable need to rely on oneself.

"I think I've helped myself and I've made things worse for myself…I've had to rely on myself quite a lot."   Ray (in care, 16)

Three young people demonstrated hardiness and an attitude to life that involves having to 'manage' or 'cope' with things.

"you have to cope innit...I can't be not motivated because if you're not motivated, you're not going nowhere…Nothing's going to change if you're not motivated."   Kathy   (care leaver, 21)

The need to remain positive and strive for a better life was also highlighted.

"I know people think it's brave what I did, but it wasn't it was just a choice and it was a daily choice of fighting it."   Chris (care leaver, 24)

"What happens, happens, you can't...get down over things that happen..."   Ray   (in care, 16)

4.2.3 Loneliness

Evident in the accounts of three of the young people was a feeling of loneliness. One of the young people spoke about the difficulties of living alone; having to carry many of the responsibilities of adulthood, although still at a comparatively young age.

"I wasn't really ready to be living by myself, I was like 'oh my god, living by myself, depression, talking to myself'..."   Phil (in care, 20)

While the policy of the LA (Boroughs 1 and 2) is to ensure that the transition from care to independence is a gradual process, for three of the young people an abrupt decision to leave more suddenly, due to negative care experiences, financial or placement constraints, often resulted in the transition process being rushed or unplanned.

"I've got my own place now...I got the tenancy on the 11th of October and I moved in a month later. I had to get out of where I was, my foster carer was like...we didn't get on..."
Phil (care leaver, 20)

Two of the young people made reference to their need to take responsibility for their own lives, often to a degree that their contemporaries living with parents would not have to be doing.

"I was sixteen when I went to independent living...I had my own flat which was permanent accommodation…but I had to move from there quickly because of domestic violence".
Kathy (care leaver, 21)

Five young people highlighted the difficulty and struggle of having no-one to rely on; young people commented that the levels of support they received by care and educational professionals was often poor and unreliable. Absent from the lives of four of the young people was a genuine relationship with a significant adult who was able to provide sufficient emotional support and guidance.

"When I was fifteen…I sat in my headmaster's office and they…asked if there was anywhere I could stay, if I had any friends or family and they went through…who I could stay with and there was no-one who either I knew…there was nowhere I belonged or I could go…so I had no option, I went through a list of my family and no-one wanted me or…could have me for whatever reason."   Chris (care leaver, 24)

4.3 Theme two: Responses to life events

Young people's accounts of their childhood years were often dominated by difficulty and disruption. Their ability to cope with these painful and unsettling experiences often caused extreme emotional and behavioural disturbances, which in turn had a significant impact on the young people's schooling and education; few young people had clear memories of their life history. For many of the young people, a critical moment or intervention during their time at school sparked a change in their behaviour, enabling them to turn things around, re-connecting them with society and schooling.

Figure 3: Thematic map illustrating theme two and corresponding subthemes
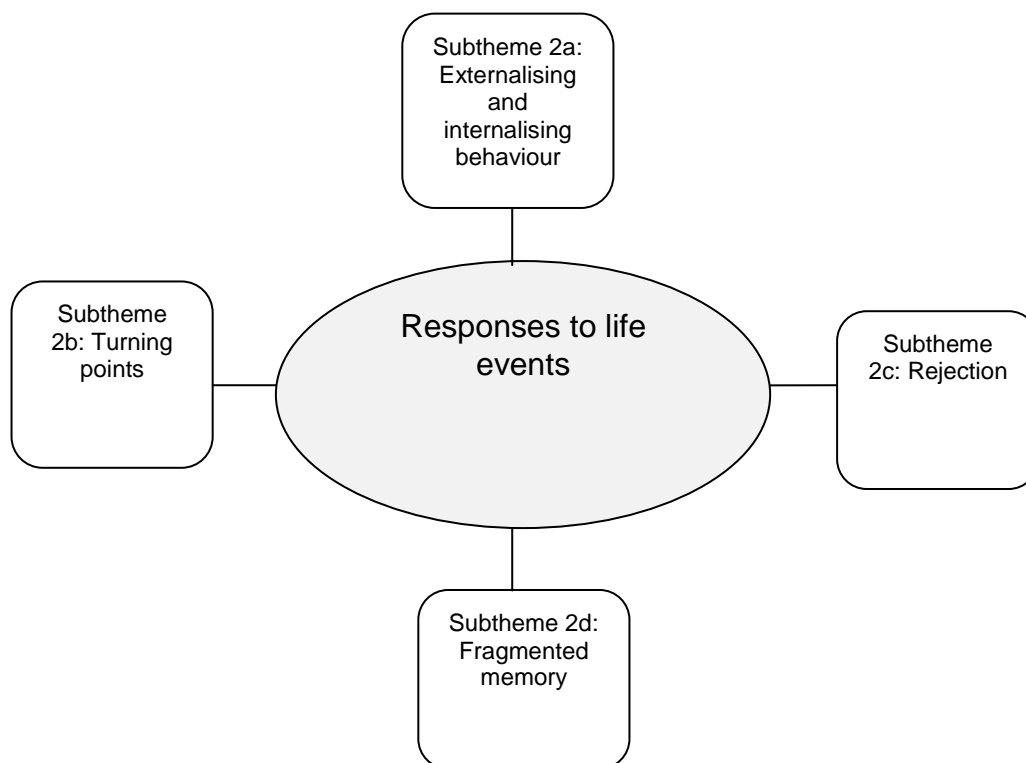
4.3.1 Externalising and internalising behaviour

Four of the young people made reference to the behaviour they exhibited as a way of expressing their feelings; primarily frustration, anger and upset, owing to their pre- and in-care experiences. For some, the feeling of being overwhelmed with emotion and not caring about the consequences of their actions, following the challenges they experienced, was apparent.

Two young care leavers recall feeling 'out of control' and being involved in anti-social behaviour, as a means of coping with life and their situation.

"I just had a temper on me…I didn't have time for school, I was more interested in smoking and being with friends, just dumb things…I regret it now but…at the time…that was where I was in my life innit? And that's the only thing that kept me going…" Kathy (care leaver, 21)

Rachel has learning difficulties. She first entered care at age 10 and prior to that experienced years of emotional abuse and neglect; her ability to manage her emotions and contain her behaviour was a significant challenge; consequently, her school experience was considerably disrupted.

"Well I was a bit back with my learning...my teachers they didn't help me...they had doubts that I wouldn't do well in my schooling...I got myself excluded quite a few times....I threw a chair at a glass, broke glass...the chair hit the teacher in the leg...I've smacked a pupil in the face...I was always rude to teachers, throw pens across the room....I didn't know what's wrong from right...I mean...I know it was wrong because now I've grown up and matured a lot, but before I didn't know what was right from wrong until I went into care." Rachel (care leaver, 19)

Another young person recalled hurting himself and others as a means of managing his frustration and anger.

"I hurt myself, I used to head butt walls when I got angry...I've knocked myself out a few times by just whacking the wall." Ray (in care, 16)

"I used to sit in school and smoke cigarettes...I've been smoking for a long time and I used to smoke because I was…just stressed out…it was just the little things like at first I was just being naughty, making a lot of noise...I just wanted to make people's day worse...I started getting involved with the wrong people in school so I took wrong things, I took stupid things again…I did one thing, but that was just stupid, it was protecting a friend, but someone put…I saw my friend do it, he had someone put a screwdriver to her…I don't know why he was doing it, some kid acting hard, I just ran up to him and cut his…I messed him up really, but…that was a stupid thing to do because I could have just got a teacher and just said 'look…' it was just like I saw my friend and just…acted…" Ray (in care, 16)

4.3.2 Turning points

As previously mentioned, the need for some of the young people, to express their feelings and emotions in a negative and anti-social manner was apparent. Nevertheless, for five of them, the desire to change their behaviour and 'turn their lives around' was evident. Some of the young people were able to isolate a particular event, person or situation, which lead to their desire to change their behaviour; others refer to a more gradual change over time, not exclusively related to one definite event.

One young person spoke honestly about her life and the changes she had made regarding her behaviour and life choices after having a child.

"I used to be really badly behaved but my son changed that...he's a blessing, trust me. If I didn't have my son…I would either be in prison…in hospital…The same domestic violence, hanging around the same stupid people…I would probably be really messed up, probably on drugs or something….But my son, like he's my main priority, he turned my life around. The day I found out I was pregnant…was the day I stopped smoking, the day I stopped drinking…even these guys will tell you here, that's it, I changed…completely, from the day I found out I was pregnant with my son everything changed."   Kathy   (care leaver, 21)

Two young people refer to supportive relationships and a feeling of being more 'serious' or 'mature', as a reason for changing their behaviour.

"Things have changed for me now...I wasn't so serious...I wanted to do well but I had so much going on and so much moving around to different places...now I reckon I am more serious. I know I can't get nowhere without any qualifications...I want to go to uni, I want to go to a good one like Brunel and Liverpool but I need to get the right grades..." Phil   (in care, 20)

Richard recalls his situation improving with the support of a foster sibling; this valuable relationship prompted him to turn his life around enabling him to re-engage with education and school.

"At primary school I made trouble along the way but secondary school was different, I wanted to go to school. It was just interesting...I guess it was because I was older, it was easier to control it and then I had another foster boy living with me...we used to...like just help each other out..."   Richard (care leaver, 18)

Ray refers to an internal awareness, his behaviour and the consequences of his actions as a major 'turning point' in modifying their behaviour and life choices.

"It wasn't all of a sudden…it's taken me a long time...I don't really know what happened, I just think I saw the bigger picture and like wow…I mean getting kicked out of somewhere where I've been for eight years...I look back and think like 'shit, I've done this at this school, this at that school, behaved like this to this person, fallen out with that…I just thought about it, I was like…why have I done it?' I never used to think about things that was my problem."
Ray (in care, 16)

4.3.3 Fragmented memory

Evident in the accounts of four of the young people was the notion of 'fragmented memory' or 'choosing' to forget their early life experiences; it is possible that this personal response was a mechanism for coping with life and new challenges.

"I don't really remember my childhood if I'm honest…I remember parts of it but…I choose not to remember it."   Ray (in care, 16)

"I don't remember what it was like at primary school...I don't remember a lot of stuff back then"   Richard (care leaver, 18)

People's memories often develop as a result of coaching by their primary carers, as many of these young people will not have experienced this – having been removed from their birth families, it is possible that they do not have a sense of who and what they are.

4.3.4 Rejection

A key theme in the lives of the young people in the study was feelings of being unloved and unwanted. Consistent in the accounts of four of the young people was a deep sense of rejection, through the actions of their birth parents and/or carers; and in the case of asylum-seekers, through war or political persecution.

"So I went through a whole list, no-one wanted me... I managed to stay on the floor of a mate's bedroom and I stayed there for a few days and then they kicked me out of the house...until I turned up at the church"   Chris (care leaver, 24)

Three young people refer to being 'thrown out' of their care placement and feeling 'unwanted'.

"I was always being kicked out or I just wanted to leave...they were always on my back...they just never wanted me around, just shouting at me and I didn't get why, I didn't do nothing wrong...."   Phil (in care, 20)

Ray, spoke openly about his eight year foster care placement; the disappointment and absolute feelings of rejection he felt at being asked to leave his "family".

"I moved from the eight year one…I was a bit naughty…they found it easier when people are going there a bit younger…they only foster children and babies now because…that's what they like…because they've got a son of their own."   Ray (in care, 16)

4.4 Theme three: Supportive contexts

Evident in all of the accounts was the value placed on 'supportive contexts' by the young people; be that a person or group of people, a belief and value system to adhere to or motivators, outside interests and hobbies. These 'supportive contexts', provided stability and

continuity in the disrupted lives of these young people; for many of them, supportive contexts also contributed to positive educational outcomes.

Figure 4: Thematic map illustrating theme three and corresponding subthemes

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┌──────────────┐                    ┌──────────────┐
│ Subtheme 3b: │                    │ Subtheme 3a: │
│Post compulsory│                   │   Positive   │
│  education   │                    │relationships │
└──────────────┘                    └──────────────┘

              ╭─────────────────────────╮
              │                         │
              │  Supportive contexts    │
              │                         │
              ╰─────────────────────────╯

┌──────────────┐                    ┌──────────────┐
│ Subtheme 3c: │                    │ Subtheme 3e: │
│Encouragement,│                    │Hobbies, outside│
│ support and  │   ┌──────────┐     │ interests,   │
│    high      │   │Subtheme 3d:│    │ activities and│
│expectations or│  │Value     │     │religious beliefs│
│ absence of   │   │education  │     └──────────────┘
└──────────────┘   └──────────┘
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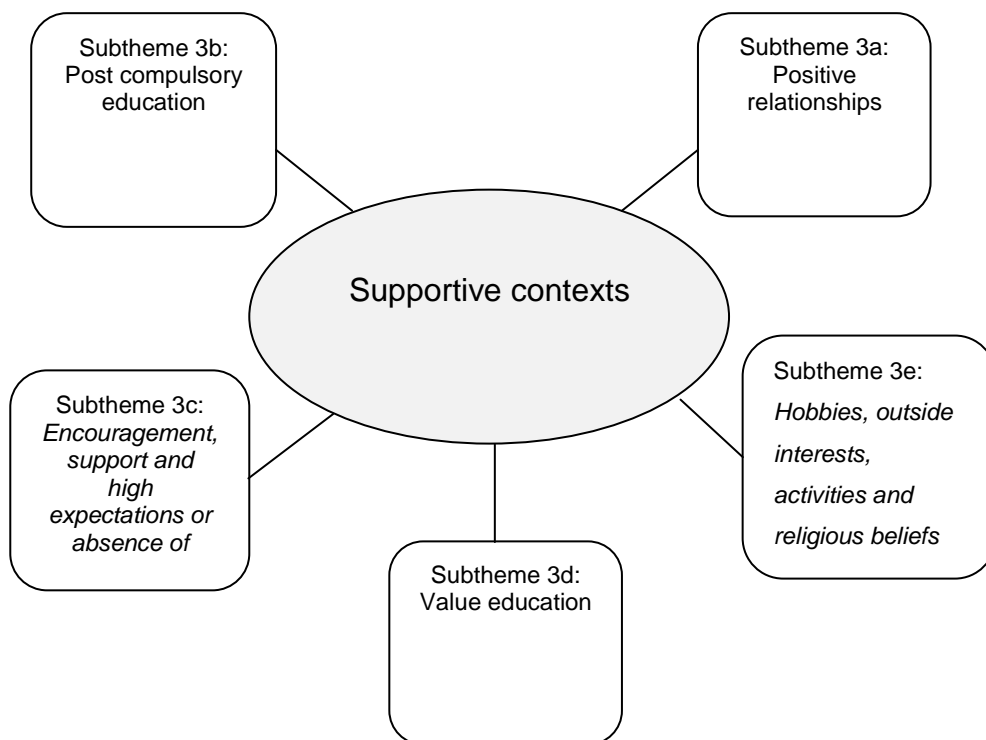
4.4.1 Positive relationships with others

Permeating the accounts of all of the young people was the importance and value of having a significant and meaningful relationship with another person. For many young people, these relationships provided stability, an opportunity to talk to someone about their difficult experiences; knowing that there was someone who cared about them, understood how they were feeling, supported and looked after their needs, was valued.

Chris spoke openly about the close relationship he had with his foster parent and the positive impact it had on his life and education.

"I absolutely loved it because…these people weren't like my parents, they sent me to school, I was clothed, I was fed, I was really skinny…I'd been brought up believing I was a coeliac, not able to eat wheat or flour and once I was fostered they made sure I had all the right…" *Chris* (care leaver, 24)

"Gary he loved me and inspired me and cared for me...he showed me what family was all about....that year the sort of father son relationship blossomed and he's become my father, you know, he is my father in the sense of you know, what a father should be...he would just test me, quiz me and sit down and do an hour of…revision and he just inspired me really because he…would make sure we cooked together and ate together and he would get up and take me to the bus stop in the morning and make sure I caught the bus and…he had to limit me when I first moved in to only two cans of Coke and two Mars bars a day because I was going mental for them!...he just loved me..." Chris (care leaver, 24)

Maggie also highlighted the importance of having a caring and encouraging 'parent' in her life.

"My foster mother was always there for me...she cared about me and wanted me to do well. She would always push me and told me I could do well in school." *Maggie (in care, 17)*

A positive relationship with a teacher or learning mentor was viewed by seven young people as important; the presence of a consistent, supportive and available adult was deemed by all in the study as invaluable.

"my head of year was very helpful…he even gave me his house number…'try go back home, if your dad's going to attack you, lock yourself in the bathroom' and he'll come, even though it's the night time, and help me…so he was really there to help me…so that was nice of him to let…to offer me support and try and…talk to my teachers for me..." Phil (in care, 20)

"My learning mentor in school...he used to take me out of lessons…helped me talk about problems at home and things like that and like my anger management…he helped me a lot…because of my attitude…I couldn't just sit in a class and listen to a teacher…I'd rather

do practical work…so he used to do practical things with me."   Kathy   (care leaver, 21)

A positive and secure relationship with a friend or sibling was highlighted by three young people as significant. Ray makes reference to his relationship with his older brother and the significant impact it had on his life; having a consistent, positive role model to look up to, appeared to be a source of power in his life.

"I've liked music for a long time, I get taught by my brother...I never used to be that good at football but my brother has always been really good at football since I can remember so he taught me how to play…I really like it now...a lot of things I do is because of my brother really..."   Ray (in care, 16).

References were made regarding the significant impact that the support and understanding, from friends, made to them and their lives.

"I have good friends…they just like...kept me smiling and stuff yeah. My best friend from my primary school was in my secondary school as well...so we have really been there for each other."   *Brenda (in care, 16)*

4.4.2 Encouragement, support and high-expectations

A subtheme permeating the accounts of all of the young people was the importance of being encouraged and supported by others and the high expectations of others for them. Some of them reported positive feelings in this area and suggested that this, in part, contributed to their drive to succeed educationally.

Seven young people commented on the support and encouragement they received from teachers and other school staff and the positive impact it had of their lives and educational outcomes.

"People were supportive...my teachers and teaching assistants. They put in my mind that in order to be successful you have to go to school and once you start to go to school you've got…to work hard…to be someone better in life."   Jacob (care leaver, 19)

"The teachers in my secondary school encouraged me to do well...they had high expectations of me."   Maggie (in care, 17)

Ray suggests that having a teacher who showed interest and encouragement in his work, resulted in him feeling confident and able to succeed.

"I like English…because I can show my English teacher my lyrics and they'll…tell me…what bits are spelt wrong and what bits I could improve...I feel they think I can do it, they help me through it and I think I can do it…"   *Ray (in care, 16)*

Chris described how teachers and staff members from his school supported and encouraged him; they believed he had the ability to achieve educationally.

"They rallied behind me which was fantastic, but I failed all my GCSEs because you can't do…GCSEs in one year can you? But I remember when I walked in to collect my GCSEs, the headmaster pulled me aside before I opened the envelope and just said 'just remember this isn't in any way a reflection of who you are or what you can be"   Chris (care leaver, 24)

Four of the young people made reference to the encouragement they received from family members and foster parents; knowing that someone was available and wanted them to succeed was viewed by many as a motivating factor enabling them to achieve.

"My sister always came to parents evenings...she was always like 'you have to work harder'....she is really smart, she helped me with my homework...she always pushed me to do well. I definitely became more motivated to do well...my sister got me a maths tutor and

like loads of subject tutors to make my grades go up, so I got As in maths in my first year"
Brenda (in care, 16)

Maggie also made reference to the support and encouragement she received from her foster mother.

"My foster mother really encouraged me...she would always sit with me and help me with my work and encourage me to do well. Every night when I came back from school she would ask me what work I had and we would go through it together." Maggie (in care, 17)

Phil commented on the support and guidance he received from his social worker; interestingly it would appear that this has been his main source of support and help throughout his care experience.

"My new social worker has been supportive…I can talk to her about my education and she helps me with that aspect...she has supported me, she's sat me down, talked of plans like what do I want to do? It's been a real help. Before this no-one helped me or supported me in that way." Phil (in care, 20)

References were made by four of the young people of the financial incentives they received (as part of the government incentive to raise the educational outcomes of LAC) for continuing with their education. For many, financial support was viewed by some as an incentive for remaining in education.

"I got money for going to college and the college I went to give bonuses as well...if you're in class every day for the month, every month you get a bonus as well" Richard (care leaver, 18)

"The motivation I got was...the money...we're getting £30 a week…if you stayed in school you got money...they give you transport money as well, as long as you go to college..." Jacob (care leaver, 19)

4.4.3 Value of education

The notion that 'education is important' was viewed but some young people as a motivational force, contributing to their desire to succeed educationally. Maggie recalls the importance placed on education by her foster mother.

"My foster mother always told me that going to school was important and working hard...she would always push me to work hard and do well." Maggie (in care, 17)

Similarly, Brenda notes the value her sister placed on education.

"My sister always pushed me with my work...she thought it was important. Sometimes she was like 'you have to do your best to get the best out of life'." Brenda (in care, 16)

The value of education was also seen in the educational backgrounds of some of the foster parents.

"My foster dad…was just starting his PhD before he decided to have me full time...he champions education." Chris (care leaver, 23)

Having a significant person in their lives that valued and championed education, appeared to have a considerable impact on their views of education and educational outcomes.

4.4.4 Hobbies, outside interests, activities and religious beliefs

Religious belief, hobbies and interests were highlighted by five of the young people as supportive in driving their education and future goals; those demonstrating outside interests were more likely to succeed educationally.

Two of the young people refer to their religious beliefs as a source of inspiration and guide to their life.

"I believe there is a God up there which you can rely on...having faith in God, someone there and when I was told the story about Solomon...he asked God for wisdom…that's what I did as well…now I was putting my faith in God and I know he will guide me and help me."
Jacob (care leaver, 19)

Ray commented on his interest in music.

"I do music like I make instrumentals up and rap...I'm going to do performing arts."
Ray (in care, 16)

Kathy spoke positively about her voluntary work.

"I'm working on the Young Parents Project as well doing voluntary work, we're doing a film at the moment about the negatives and positives of being a young parent…I do drama workshops on a Monday afternoon with children with disabilities with X."
Kathy (care leaver, 21)

4.4.5 Post-compulsory education-

Of the young people interviewed, five had continued into post-compulsory education (three had attended or were currently attending university and two were undertaking their A-levels with a view to going to university) and a further young person was to start her A-levels the following academic year. Of the four remaining, two had continued onto college to study vocational courses and one was currently NEET.

Five young people made reference to personal targets and goals they would like to achieve in relation to their education.

"I want to go to university...I would like to go to Kings College...or Imperial College, but I'd need all As...for Kings I need...Bs, at least a B in biology and chemistry." Maggie (in care, 17)

4.4.6 Financial incentives

All the young people in the study were reliant on public financial support. The extent to which was dependent on whether a young person was in higher education, further education or NEET. Those in further and higher education were entitled to greater financial support by leaving care teams and social services, than young people not in education. For many this was a determining factor in their choosing to continue with their education and to go into higher education.

Two young people highlighted the importance of having financial support for continuing with their education.

"They give us like £30 a week to go to college…they pay our travel…that is good because…if they didn't do that I probably wouldn't be in college right now because that helps my lunch out..." Kathy (care leaver, 21)

Rachel (NEET) suggested that financial incentives were, in essence, her motivation for attempting to obtain an education.

"I started doing a four month course on my basics English and maths at a college...this was the third time now, because I didn't complete the course. I dropped out half way through, things got hard...the course, the work...so I dropped out, went back, dropped out, kept on dropping out of things....they pay you £30 a week to do the course...that's the only reason why I did the education." Rachel (care leaver, 19)

4.5 Theme 4: Negotiating challenging systems

Implicit in the young people's accounts was the failure of systems in meeting their needs. All had endured difficult and challenging life experiences; having to follow particular protocols and regulations, brought about by these systems, resulted in many them feeling frustrated and at a loss.

Figure 5: Thematic map illustrating theme four and corresponding subthemes
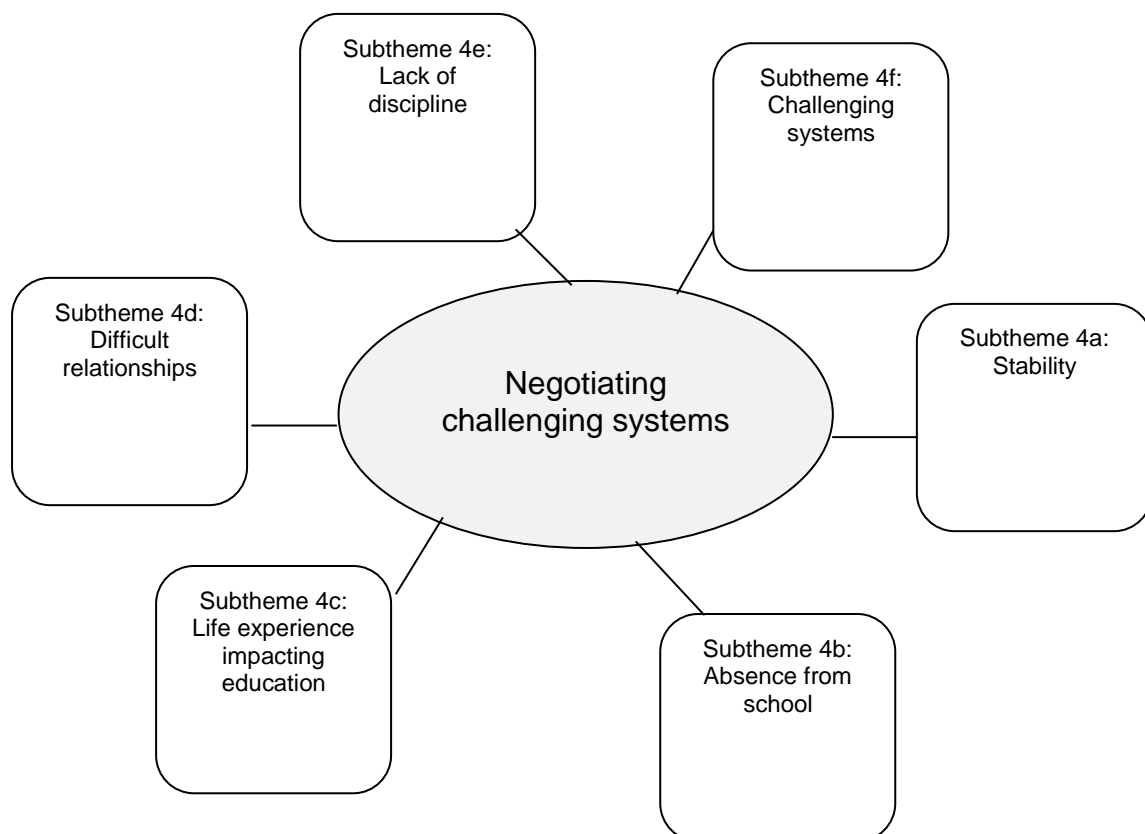
4.5.1 Stability vs instability

'Moving around' and 'instability' was a common subtheme in the accounts of many young people. Repeated changes of home and school placements were reported as negatively impacting their lives and educational outcomes. The following quotes are examples of some of the difficult experiences they endured.

"I've moved quite a few times…eleven I think, I'm not sure....but it's always different…when I moved from when I was three years…they just told 'you need to get in the car now,'…I don't know what was going on but when I moved from the eight years it was all like said and like had time to like...just like think."   Ray (in care, 16)

"I've moved more than twenty times. My first one I had a fight with a member of staff…then I got moved to another place and that place got shut down and then I got moved to another one and then that was just a shit hole, so I just moved from there and stayed with my sister and went into semi-independent on my sixteenth birthday...even since then I've moved round loads of times, like refugees and back to my property and refuge…it's been a lot…now I'm just settled and just waiting to be moved again."
Kathy (care leaver, 21)

For five of the young people a change of care placement often resulted in further disruption with the change of school.

"I went to quite a few schools…I changed schools when I moved." Rachel (care leaver, 19)

"I've been to multiple schools because…in the first fifteen years we lived a couple of years with my dad and then when he had enough he would drive us back to mum's and then we'd live there for a few years and then when things became unstable we'd go back to our dad's and we'd go into refuge homes as well when mum was fleeing from boyfriends."
Chris (care leaver, 24)

The instability of care and the frequency of placement moves, which took no account of the impact on the leisure and social lives of young people in the study, was a reoccurring theme. Three young people noted that maintaining friendships was difficult due to living a long distance from their friends (in their home town or from a previous care placement) and the leisure activities they had been involved in:

"Friends…I don't have them now…I had friends but then I moved..."   Ray (in care, 16)

Ray referred to his number of changes in school placement, due to his challenging behaviour.

"I've been to a few schools...Mainstream, non-mainstream, non-mainstream, non-mainstream, mainstream…then non-mainstream, then here…I got kicked out of a mainstream and then I went to a non-mainstream and then they sent me to another non-mainstream and…that's when I moved and I got put in a non-mainstream…but I dunno what happened there…"   Ray (in care, 16)

Ray's quote demonstrates the lack of communication with regards to why a placement change is necessary. Five of the young people report fewer changes of placement; unsurprisingly, they experienced more consistent educational outcomes.

"I went into care when I was about four...I was with my first foster family for about eight years and then I moved to another foster family, that's where I am now...my first foster family moved to Italy, that's why I had to move....but I'm still in touch with them."
Maggie (in care, 17)

"I was living with my foster mum from October 2003 to 2006...I was always with her until I went to live in university."   Harriet (care leaver, 23)

4.5.2 Absence from school

Four of the young people made reference to their absence from school and consequently the impact it had on their educational outcomes. Some highlighted the failure of systems in getting them back into school.

"I was never in school...my mum, she wouldn't wake up early enough, so I didn't go...and then I didn't get stuff...I had missed so much, I was back in my learning." Rachel (care leaver, 19)

"They couldn't do anything to get me back into school once I got to school I'd go back out of school, I would just sit somewhere and they would just sort of be like he's not going to do anything he may as well stay at home." Ray (in care, 16)

"I didn't go school...I would hang out with my friends…wait till 3.30 to pick up my money..." Kathy (care leaver, 21)

Craig made references regarding the failure of systems in getting him back into school and into care.

"I'd always turn up to school late because…I'd try and set my alarm in the morning and when I went to bed my mum would come in during the night and switch it off, so that I would sleep in or I would miss my alarm so I'd be late for school…I was trying to go to school but she had other things for me to do…" Chris (care leaver, 24)

Four of the young people made reference to their lengthy periods out of school.

"I left primary school at like Year 4 I think 'til Year 6.... I just wouldn't go to school" Ray (in care, 16)

"No, I didn't do my GCSEs, I left school in Year 9 and that's it." Kathy (care leaver, 21)

4.5.3 Life experience impacting on education

Three young people spoke openly about the challenges they experienced at home and the difficulties of focusing on their work and education. The following quotes (their experiences before coming into care) address some of the difficulties they faced and the subsequent challenge of having to manage and focus at school.

"It's not that I didn't like school, it's…waking up in the morning, trying to think, getting out of bed is the worst thing....just too much going on. Sometimes it was hard to concentrate and other times it wasn't…like I tried to put my mind on my education rather than my home, I tried to take my mind off things, but not all the time I could take my mind off."
Rachel (care leaver, 19)

A consistent theme permeating many of their accounts was the difficulty of engaging with school and their education, due to their personal circumstances and traumatic life experiences. Their 'chaotic' lives made it difficult for them to concentrate on their work and in some cases attend school.

"I didn't really focus when I was in primary school...it was hard to concentrate as I had other things on my mind...my mum wasn't well...and there were lots of arguments at home...so I couldn't really concentrate at school...no I wasn't motivated, I just had other things on my mind."   *Maggie (in care, 17)*

For-two-young-people-school-was-viewed-as-a-refuge-from-their-difficult-family-circumstances.

"when I stood outside that Post Office knowing that my mum was watching me 'cause she'd always tell me that she was watching me and I better go and do it, otherwise when I'd get back she would throw an ashtray at me or something like that. I just walked away…just gave in and walked the three miles to school and when I got there…I remember being called out of…the class by my head teacher and he said 'we hear that you've gone away, you've got to

go back home.'...I just said to them 'you guys just don't get it, if I go home I will be hit…I will be beaten up by my stepdad…I won't be back at school.'"   *Chris (care leaver, 24)*

The following quotes are examples of some of the challenges faced by young people once in care.

"I was kind of depressed in a way but didn't know it because I couldn't focus on school work and that kept me behind like after my GCSEs…even during my GCSEs I had too much going on with different carers…I was even ill my exam week…so like I got four Ds…at the time I had to re-take"   Phil (care leaver, 20)

"When I went into my semi-independence…I was just around a lot of people like drug dealers…there was always drug dealing going on in my house and the staff didn't care…" Kathy (care leaver, 21)

4.5.4 Difficult relationships

A particular area of concern was the numbers of young people who described difficult relationships with carers and professionals; this included a lack of or limited support and encouragement from others regarding their lives and education. For some this appeared to negatively impact their educational outcomes, while for others, their strength and motivation to succeed was acquired elsewhere.

Two young people spoke candidly about their poor relationships with foster parents. On numerous occasions Phil makes reference to the absence of love in the relationship and his resulting feelings of depression.

"I just feel like the environment I was in with her was depressing because there was no kind of like love…it was just fake...I could tell she wanted the money.   Phil (in care, 20)

Ray notes feeling disliked and criticised by his foster parents. The absence of a significant person in his life, during this time, had a detrimental effect on his feelings of self and his educational engagement.

"My foster parents they weren't very nice, they didn't like me...they used to call me stuff... like…you're a druggie; you'll never make it…"   Ray (in care, 16)

Five of the young people's accounts refer to the absence of support and guidance from carers, teachers and social workers, particularly in relation to their education and future employment.

Two young people spoke candidly about feeling 'let down' and disempowered by social services.

"They don't tell you nothing...even before I was going through domestics and I was in hospitals, they could have helped me with courses and things, but they don't…They don't tell you about things that are happening, you have to come into their office and see something on the wall and then question about it. Like outside reception you'll see loads of little application forms for part-time jobs at the moment…youth work and that but they don't tell people that, they don't ring you and say 'oh look, Kate, something's popped up' as you'd expect a social worker to do, 'cause they're meant to be looking out for you like that, but they don't, so…you just have to do it yourself.... like I could have done my level two a long time ago…I could have done it before I even thought about my son…Social workers and that, they didn't push you to…or offer you things or help you out…cause of their lack of communication in this building."   Kathy (care leaver, 21)

"you know, we weren't championed…our parents weren't excited about us…we were always an inconvenience instead of a joy and you know, the things that parents should be…thinking in terms of their children...so I say social services failed us because repeatedly we ran away…my two older sisters who were fifteen and fourteen and I was twelve at the time, were caught walking on the motorway back from X where our parents decided to move one week and we went into….we moved down there and somebody gave us a room to stay in and we spent six months out of school…"   Chris (care leaver, 24)

Others-suggested-that-accessing-their-education was hindered by carers' who-seemed-to-lack-interest-in-their-education.

"Hang out with my friends and wait till 3.30 to pick up my money and that was it…just sleep all day and then go out 3.30 innit like? But it was rubbish because really and truly like if…I was at home my dad would have been like 'no, you're going school' kind of thing and…like as a mum now, that's what I will be like with my son…I'm not trying to hear that you didn't want to go to school, you're going to school..." Kathy (care leaver, 21)

"As I was trying to revise she was always there causing conflict with me...I didn't feel like I could revise, I didn't feel I could stay in the house, I just wanted to get away" Phil (in care, 20)

Three young people described feeling hopeless and were less likely to work hard due to teachers' low expectations. Absent from the lives of some was a significant person who was able to support and advocate for their education and achievement.

"In college no-one pushed me to do well… they didn't push me to do well...I didn't pass it at all, the teachers I thought were jokes. When lessons were finished they would run straight home they never stayed back to give extra support, so I thought you know, because they were slacking in their responsibilities and I will be a bit of a slacker myself, I didn't really go far." Phil (in care, 20)

"No-one thought I would do well in my schooling..." Rachel (care leaver, 19)

4.5.5 Lack-of-discipline/boundaries

Four young people commented on the 'lack of discipline' and boundaries put in place by teachers, carers and service staff; this appeared to have a significant impact on their education and life experience.

"My foster parents never told me off...they did nothing really, just sent me to bed early...they could never tell me off because I would shout at them."   Rachel (care leaver, 19)

"Staff couldn't tell me nothing...I'm hanging outside of school the teachers would be like…to my friends 'I'm ringing your mum and dad' and they would run back in 'cause they're scared, because they're gonna ring their mum and dad. With me, it was kind of…you're going to ring my staff, what are they gonna do? They can't do or say nothing to me…"   Kathy (care leaver, 21)

4.5.6 Challenging systems

Several of the young people highlighted the lack of support and effort made by social services to meet their needs. Two comment on the failure of social services to remove them from their traumatic home situations, despite their repeated attempts to make them aware of their situation. In both cases, they resorted to seeking advice and support from school staff instead, in the hope of making a change.

"I'm actually in the process of writing to social services and school and asking for any records that they have open of me under the Freedom of Information Act…because I think it'd be so interesting to see just how many times we had it out with social services. I remember when my mum was an alcoholic…we were put on red alert multiple times and we were constantly taken away and put with our father but he had his own problems."
Chris (care leaver, 24)

"They called the social services and the social services came out, I remember two ladies in my headmaster's office…they told me…they would find me a place to stay…that when I was sixteen they'd give me my own place, that I would get support from social services and everything would be fine and I knew it wouldn't because I'd heard it time and time before. The year before when my mum went back into a refuge when I was fourteen…the social services gave me a card on the sly and said, 'if you want to talk about anything, just call me' and I called her from the phone box on the estate that I was living and told her what was going and she told me afterwards that by law she had to report it to the police because

of…violence and the abuse that was taking place, so I had no choice, even though I begged her not to, I had no choice but to go into the woman's refuge and see her…and then she called the police and the police went round and told my parents that they had taken me in and so forth and again, they told me everything was going to be fine, but then they put me with my dad and my dad…had a…was married to another woman and had his own kids and I stayed there for about a week and then he one day just drove me back home. It was such an awful thing for him to do."   Chris (care leaver, 24)

Six young people reported insufficient support from social services and a feeling of being 'let down'. For Kathy, a supportive relationship with school staff proved to be the catalyst for her transition into care.

"My school were the ones that helped me take social services to court…at first they kept telling me to go home and all my problems at home, I couldn't go home and then when it went to court the judge…made me a ward of court and…they put me under a full care order, but that was only because my teachers got me a solicitor and things like that."   Kathy (care leaver, 21)

In addition to a feeling of not being heard, some commented on the lack of communication and practical support they received from social services, regarding their transition to independence, such as, living arrangements, financial support, further and higher education.

"Social services haven't really told me much...apparently I get some money that goes towards the university and how I live...but I don't really know anything."   Brenda (in care, 16)

"Social services didn't really tell me anything...they haven't really explained anything to me about what's happening once I finish school or anything"   Maggie (in care, 17)

Phil believed the system failed him by removing him from his parents for longer than necessary; he believed he would have achieved better educational outcomes had he been returned home.

"At primary school I got all level 4s, which was average and then I got level 5s...my mum pushed me to do well so…I reckon if I was living at home I would have done better, I would be more likely going into doing medical science and all that."   Phil (in care, 20)

4.5.7 Pupil views

When asked what could be done to improve the educational experience for LAC, many of them called for additional support and encouragement from carers, school staff and social workers; the importance of valuing education was addressed and above all the need to be listened to and their opinions respected. The following quotes are some examples of what young people felt would make a difference.

1. Educational support and encouragement/guidance

"I think motivating them and encouraging them, that's really what's going to make a difference for young people." Maggie (in care, 17)

"There is a need for more one-to-one support maybe like more learning mentors…I don't know about school…it depends on who you live with, what staff and that because you can have some staff that will help you with your coursework or like your GCSEs…some staff don't have time to do that. So if you've got a member of staff that does have time to do that then yeah, you'll probably be more motivated to do it…."
Kathy (care leaver, 21)

Information sharing and effective communication between home and school was also highlighted by young people.

"I think the first things for young people to do well is family supporting for children and looking after them so contacting the teacher and the staff at the college or at the school and tell them how they're doing...just look after them…check their home book and help them…if you let them know you're there for them you can do wonders for them really."
Jacob (care leaver, 19)

2. Listen to young people

"What would make a difference is for these people to listen to them…"   Phil (in care, 20)

3. Value education

"I'll tell you what could make a difference is…show children the importance of education, I know it's going to be harder, preferably get young people to come and talk to them..."
Phil (in care, 20)

4. Stability

"Make sure they get the right people in their lives, make sure they have…stable life…"
Rachel (care leaver, 19)

5. Change in policy and practice

"I think the biggest recommendation I would give is…policy that it is just so broad in the sense that it tries to put everyone in one camp…like the issue of parents, you know, children are best placed with their parents on the whole, it just wasn't the case for me and that meant my life was so difficult because the system that was in place, the policy that was out there meant that I had to always be sent to either my dad or my mum and that's where the issue was..."   Chris (care leaver, 24)

6. Resilience

"My advice would be that even if they are having problems they should stick to it, don't just drop out of school because it could just make it worse." Richard (care leaver, 18)

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Chapter Overview

Chapter four identified the following themes from the data collected: Personal Characteristics, Responses to life events, Supportive Contexts and Negotiating Challenging Systems. Chapter five will first explore the findings in relation to the study's research question, as set out in Chapter one and will then be considered in the context of research literature around the educational experiences of LAC. A detailed critique of the current research will then be provided and the findings will be discussed in relation to previous research presented in Chapter 2, educational psychology practice and other wider implications. Potential areas for future research will also be explored.

5.2 Revisiting the research question in light of the study findings

Research Question:

What are the views of young people regarding the factors that contribute to the educational success and hindrance of young people from a care background and how does this influence their outcomes?

Chapter 2 considered the main factors, as identified in previous research, that help young people to achieve in education and those which help to explain low attainment and limited opportunities, including those selected for showing educational promise. The young people in this current thesis further highlighted factors such as stability of placement and schooling, being placed with carers who gave priority to education, feeling that there was someone who really cared about them and their achievements and having sufficient financial support and suitable accommodation to pursue their educational objectives; a high level of motivation and expectation of themselves was prominent, particularly amongst more successful young people – these young people were strongly motivated to have a better life than their parents and clearly saw education as a way of achieving this.

5.3 Discussion of themes in relation to current research

5.3.1 Theme 1: Personal characteristics

5.3.1.1 Self-motivation

Five young people in the study commented on their desire to learn and motivation to achieve; this is reflective of the study sample. For two young people, education and career aspirations were highlighted as incentives for working hard in school, while for others financial gains were paramount. Two care leavers in this current thesis made reference to an internal drive and desire to succeed, despite the many challenges and barriers they faced in accessing their learning. Their desire to do something positive with their lives, to achieve and secure a stable and happy future for themselves was a huge source of motivation for them in the face of multiple adversities. The notion of self-motivation and incentives for learning was highlighted in the literature review in Chapter 2, Moran, (2007) found that care leavers often have a considerable degree of interest in and commitment to education and central to their eventual success is their own motivation and initiative-taking; their ability to take charge of their learning and be active in the process of their own learning (other studies that have sought LAC's views of EET and have identified this as a feature include, Jackson et al, 1998; Celeste, 2011) Consistent with Cameron (2007) five young people in this current thesis reported that the key to their success was reliance on their own resources, taking the initiative, rather than relying on any external sources of formal support. Jackson and Cameron (2011) noted that young people had a strong sense of autonomy and resilience and believed they had the ability to achieve their goals and ambitions, if they worked hard enough.

Exploring the hopes and aspirations of LAC, Cameron et al (2010) highlighted a number of key barriers to achieving educational aspirations including; financial difficulties, caring responsibilities, lack of work experience, legal status, language barriers, lack of support from professionals and health problems. Educational delay was found to be very common, with many continuing in education into their 20s; for one young person this impacted their ability and motivation to remain in education. Two care leavers in this current thesis reported delays in their education, having to repeat examinations due to disruptions to their schooling and challenges at home. However, despite these delays, both young people were motivated and keen to succeed, one having progressed to further education and the other onto higher

education. When reflecting on their experiences, both young people made reference to an internal drive to succeed and recognised the importance of education for the development of self-reliance and independence. Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2002) suggests the importance of intrinsic motivation for meeting psychological needs.

5.3.1.2 Resilience and self-reliance

Consistent with research reviewed in the literature (Moran, 2007) in Chapter 2, the narratives of many young people in the study highlight their desire to overcome their chaotic and disordered pre-care experiences, in the hope of creating a new and positive life for themselves. Despite their earlier life experiences, five young people had a strong sense of independence and resilience and believed that with hard work, they were able to bring about positive change in their lives. Their desire to do something constructive with their lives, to achieve and secure a stable and happy future for themselves was a huge source of motivation in spite of the difficulties they had to manage. In the main, young people in this thesis demonstrated an interest and desire to learn; their ability to move past their damaging past and focus on their education was largely due to their own motivation and need for something better; their ability to take an active part in their own learning. Rutter (2006) argues that risk is essential to developing resilience and highlights the value of a limited amount of positive stress when faced with manageable challenges, as it can improve feelings of competency, resulting in self-efficacy and resilience. Woodier (2011) suggests that young people benefit from moderate levels of risk in preparing them to manage future experiences of adversity. Young people in the current study were faced with risks and challenges in their attempts to achieve better life outcomes, yet in doing so were able to become more resilient. This research would therefore seem to suggest that rather than protecting young people in care from risk (owing to their vulnerability), this research suggests a potential for growth in the face of moderate challenges.

Mallon (2007) found that while being in care was reported by all care leavers as having had a damaging effect on their formal education, those who continued onto higher education (or returned at a later time) were examples of those who were sufficiently resilient to return to education as mature students. Three of the young people in this current thesis had continued onto higher education and two young people were hoping to progress to university the following year; two of these young people had experienced a delay in progressing to university as a result of having to retake GCSEs and/or A levels to gain better grades.

Consistent with previous findings (e.g. Jackson et al, 1998) this outcome was enabled by the range of internal protective factors including, stability and continuity, extra-curricular or spare time activities, the influence of a mentor and supportive adult, support from foster carers and encouragement to achieve, a secure base or attachment to a significant adult (Geddes, 2009) and self-reliance or the motivation to succeed.

5.3.1.3 Loneliness

Evident in the accounts of three young people was a feeling of loneliness; having to cope and manage with many of the responsibilities of adulthood, while still at a comparatively young age and often in isolation. Though the policy of the LA (Boroughs 1 and 2) is to encourage young people to remain in care up to 18yrs, there was a tendency for some to want to leave earlier; this was often due to negative care experiences and financial or placement constraints. Three care leavers described the struggles of having to live alone and the difficulties of dealing with life's challenges, whilst attempting to engage with their education. Issues around loneliness were less apparent amongst the group of young people still in care; it is likely that the structure and support they received from their home settings, carers, school and school staff, may have buffered against these feelings of loneliness and isolation. Cameron et al (2010) found that young people had difficulty transitioning to independence and struggled to cope with everyday living; having to clean and cook for themselves, manage their own finances and living alone, even before considering how to embark on further and/or higher education, was particularly challenging. Similar findings were reported for unaccompanied young asylum seekers. Kohli and Mather (2003) noted that unaccompanied young asylum seekers reported feelings of loneliness and isolation in conjunction with the unfamiliarity of place and culture, although they do have supportive adults albeit at a distance. Care leavers lack the wider adult support network to provide either emotional or financial support during times of stress. The sense of being on your own to manage life's challenges goes beyond conventional notions of loneliness and provides a strong rationale for extending support for care leavers up to the age of 25 in the way most families would.

Further references made by young people to feeling lonely, were in relation to the limited amount of emotional support they received and the absence of a genuine relationship with a significant adult. Previous research reviewed in the literature in Chapter 2 (Bowlby, 1953)

has demonstrated that all children have an innate, proximity seeking behaviour towards a caregiver for the purposes of gaining physical and emotional comfort and protection. For LAC, their ability to form such attachments with care givers is often challenging, due to their disordered and difficult early life experiences. Instead many of these children are often exposed to weak or broken attachments. Attachment theorists suggest that for children with insecure attachment patterns, this may include some LAC, the importance of developing affectionate relationships with caregivers who act as a secure base, where they can function effectively both emotionally and cognitively is essential, in order to manage their anxieties (Geddes 2009) and enable them to develop a sense of identity and belonging (Fernandez, 2009). The importance of developing a secure base for LAC through, for example, a relationship with a significant adult is therefore essential to enabling these young people to feel a sense of belonging and encourage positive educational outcomes. Interestingly, young people in this current thesis who had a genuine secure relationship (this was identified in the narratives of young people who described a protective and dependable relationship with a significant adult) with a significant adult did not describe feelings of loneliness. Further studies have also established an association between attachment and resilience, suggesting that a positive and genuine relationship with a significant adult can lead to increased resilience (McMurray et al, 2008).

Recent changes to the Children and Families Act (2014) highlight the importance of providing LAC with the necessary social and emotional support necessary to achieve and attain positive educational outcomes. For example, the introduction of 'staying put arrangements' that allow young people to remain in care until the age of 21 years; this places a greater duty on LAs and other professionals to provide advice, assistance and support, including financial support to these young people and better facilitates the transition to adulthood. This new law highlights a positive step towards supporting the social, emotional and financial needs of LAC.

5.3.2 Theme 2: Responses to life events

5.3.2.1 Rejection

Consistent with research presented in the literature review in Chapter 2, a recurring theme in the narratives of four of the young people in the study was a sense of rejection and a feeling of being unwanted; this was often owing to the actions of their birth families (Sinclair and Gibbs, 1998) and experiences in their care lives and the care system (Gilligan, 2007a). Eight of the young people had experienced severe neglect and abuse before entering care and they reported a lack of support and interest for their education from birth parents; they generally did not value education, praise educational achievements or encourage school attendance. For three young people, coming into care further affirmed these feelings of rejection. They reported negative relationships with foster and/or residential carers, some included accounts of unsatisfactory care placements, involving neglect and mistreatment; others described feeling unwanted, primarily due to being treated unfairly or being asked to leave a long term placement they viewed as home and family.

The experience of being in the care system and exposure to fragmentation and constant disruptions reflects the complex interaction of poor attachments and systemic failures of the care system. New legislation aims to challenge some of these difficulties by enabling support for LAC up to 21 years or 25 years where the young person is engaged in education or training (DfE, 2014).

5.3.2.2 Externalising vs internalising behaviour

Four young people in the study reported negative experiences at school, before and after coming into care. These narratives were often characterised by poor relations with teachers and pupils, severe anger problems and disruptive behaviour stemming from difficult life experiences and time in care and a more general disengagement with education. One young person with learning difficulties suggested that her reasons for acting out was, in part, a result of her learning difficulties not being appropriately addressed. Previous research (Evans, 2000) highlights the high percentage of SEN amongst LAC and the challenge teachers face in managing their behaviour (Fletcher et al, 2003). It is significant that young

people who were generally positively oriented towards education also demonstrated disruptive behaviour and difficulties managing their frustration and anger; these behaviours often prevented them from engaging with their education fully.

Consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, two young people in this current thesis often described themselves as having behaved badly at school, due to difficult or unsettling experiences at home (Harker et al, 2004). Cameron et al (2010) suggest that as the process of coming into care presents a number of changes and challenges, events leading up to this point often caused extreme emotional and behavioural difficulties; subsequently impacting their school experience. Young people in this current thesis noted that in retrospect, they regretted having not made more effort to conform, considering that their behaviour may have prevented them from achieving their best and on some occasions leading to internal and external exclusions. Exclusion from school, due to behavioural difficulties is a major hazard for LAC (SEU, 2003) and has shown to contribute to their low attainment. This highlights the importance of meeting the mental health needs of this group at the point of entering care. As evidenced in Chapter 2, due to the long term consequences of exposure to adversity, LAC are four times more likely to require support from mental health services, yet few receive the support they need and their disruptive behaviour often leads to a run of exclusions (Jackson et al, 2001).

5.3.2.3 Turning points

In this current thesis a 'turning point' is defined as the desire to change ones behaviour and to alter one's life for the better. A 'turning point' can present itself gradually over time or can be in response to a particular event, person or situation. Turning points in the lives of LAC, were not highlighted within the previous literature reviewed, but were significant in the accounts of many of the young people in this current thesis. Five young people reported a significant moment in their lives enabling them to turn things around and help re-engage them with education. These turning points were not necessarily factual events but rather an interpretation of a moment in time, which may or may not have been linked with a specific life event or change in their lives. For example, for one young person the birth of her son presented as a motivator to change her life and behaviour and provided an opportunity for her to re-evaluate her life, identify her priorities and make a positive change. 'Turning points' such as these were often seen to motivate and encourage young people to achieve and inspired some on to post 16 pathways, seeing them continue onto further and occasionally

higher education. For two of the young people who had negative experiences of school, their situation improved as a result of a supportive relationship, which prompted a change in their lives. For example, one young person referred to the supportive relationship of a foster sibling, which in turn prompted him to make a positive change in his life and enable him to re-engage with education and school. These two young people (care leavers) made reference to supportive relationships and a feeling of being more 'mature' for the change in their behaviour. It is possible that due to their age and the stage in their lives, care leavers were able to reflect on their past experiences and bring about positive change.

One young person describes his 'turning point' as a 'gradual awakening', having made the decision to 'turn his life around' and bring about a positive change over a period of time. Reflecting on his past behaviours and the disappointment of having to leave his foster family of eight years, he became aware that he needed to modify his behaviour and life choices in order to live a more positive and happy life. Yair (2009) explores the concept of 'turning points' in the lives of LAC, during which their life course changes direction. He argues that turning points occur following a critical moment in a young person's life, providing opportunities for them to turn things around and make positive life changes.

5.3.2.4 Fragmented memory

Fragmented memory was not previously discussed in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and few studies have explored the notion of fragmented memory in children as a result of traumatic experiences. The accounts of four young people in current thesis were not entirely complete. When asked to recount their early childhood, educational and school experiences and their parent's interest in their education, some were not always willing to discuss these in detail. On occasion the memory of parents and early life experiences were too painful to discuss and occasionally they were unable to remember or 'chose' not to remember particular experiences or events; for some, a fragmented lifestyle and the absence of an adult to hold and store their memories is significant. In cases of unaccompanied asylum seekers, some had been under pressure not to discuss their experiences or their home backgrounds, by third parties, such as agents.

Theorists have debated the concept of 'motivated forgetting', a psychological defence mechanism in which people consciously or unconsciously forget unwanted and often painful

memories (Weiner, 1968). The theory suggests that people often forget things due to not wanting to remember an experience or event; painful and distressing memories are made unconscious and consequently are very difficult to retrieve, although they remain in storage (Anderson et al, 1995). As the young people endured traumatic and painful experiences in their lives, it is possible that some of these memories were consciously or unconsciously 'forgotten'.

5.3.3 Theme 3: Supportive Contexts

5.3.3.1 Positive relationships with others

Having a positive, consistent and stabilizing relationship with a significant other, such as a foster carer, teacher, mentor and/or social worker, was viewed as important. For all of the young people, these relationships provided stability; knowing that someone cared about them, supported and looked after them and was available to listen to them, was valued. For example, one care leaver spoke movingly about the loving and caring relationship he had with his foster parent. These findings are consistent with Lucey and Walkerdine, (2000) that having a relationship with a significant adult who offered consistent support and encouragement, is of great importance and is strongly linked to educational success and positive outcomes for all children, and in particular for children in care and care leavers.

According to attachment theorists (Bowlby, 1988), children develop affectionate relationships with caregivers who act as a secure base. This relationship then serves as a guide to future relationships (Phillips, 2007); the possibility of developing and sustaining multiple attachments in care giving contexts, such as foster or residential care settings, was also recognised. All of the young people in this current thesis valued having a relationship with a significant adult, which provided a secure and supportive space for them to manage their anxieties and develop the skills needed to establish and secure future relationships. Fernandez (2007) noted that the ability to form a consistent and supportive relationship with a significant other such as a foster carer, was instrumental in developing the young person's ability to form future relationships (Fernandez, 2007), a sense of self and encourage self-efficacy and resilience (McMurray et al, 2008).

The wider literature around children and young people from a care background also highlights the value of significant relationships. Fernandez (2009) noted that high cohesion

between a young person in care and their foster mother was closely linked to more positive emotional outcomes, as demonstrated when using the Emotional Subscale of the Action Records of the UK Looked-after Children's Framework (Parker, Ward, Jackson, Aldgate, & Wedge, 1991). Furthermore, relationships with foster family members were also found to have significant developmental benefits and positive outcomes for these young people (Fernandez, 2007).

Friendships and relationships with birth and/or foster siblings were highlighted as important to young people. One care leaver referred to the supportive and valuable relationship he had with his foster sibling; this relationship enabled him to engage with his education and school life. Many of the friendship networks described were established in educational settings and largely contributed to young people remaining in education. Though this was not specifically addressed in the literature review in Chapter 2, the importance of friendship networks and sibling support has been emphasised in the wider literature. McCormick (2010) notes that whilst 50 percent of young people in foster care who have siblings are not placed with them, those who do have contact with siblings rely on them for support. McCormick also highlights the importance of this relationship where parents are absent or traumatic events have occurred. Consistent with Emond's (2003) finding that young people in care appreciated having access to peers who had experienced similar difficulties as them, one young person in this current thesis highlighted the value of having friends to talk to who had experienced being in care too. Clough, Bullock and Ward (2006) noted that the development and fostering of friendships had a positive impact on young people's sense of well-being.

Previous studies (e.g. Francis, 2000; O'Sullivan et al, 2007) have demonstrated that fragmentation and disrupted education, including frequent moves of school severely impact on LACs educational success and higher educational achievement and supportive social networks. This highlights how disrupted attachments extend beyond those with the care giver, and impacts on wider support networks, including peers, siblings, extended family and professionals like teachers.

5.3.3.2 Encouragement, support and high expectations

Consistent with research reviewed in Chapter 2, all young people in the current study referred to various people who supported and encouraged them with their education. For all of the young people, educational support improved once they were taken into care and while there was mostly a poor level of support for education within care placements, four young people did comment that foster carers had offered them support and encouragement with their education. Consistent with Jackson et al, (2007) four young people in this current thesis attributed their educational achievement and success in accessing further and higher education to the support and interest of their carers. Jackson et al, (1998) showed that foster carers views on education was crucial to the success or otherwise of LAC; since the 1940s educational researchers have consistently demonstrated that attainment and educational pathways are more strongly influenced by home than school (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). Noteworthy, young people in this thesis cared for in residential provision reported neutral or negative experiences of support from carers for their education; these findings are coherent with previous research, demonstrating that residential care staff were less likely to prioritise education (Dearden, 2004).Hence the need to prioritise education and to support and sustain relationships as part of this process is therefore key to ensuring that LAC make progress and achieve positive educational and life outcomes.

Overall, young people in this current thesis reported limited systemic encouragement and support for education from professionals and more specifically social workers; this reflects previous research (Francis, 2000). Consistent with Cameron (2007), seven young people in this current thesis commented that teachers supported and encouraged their education. Gilligan (2007) suggests that the role of teachers be expanded beyond that of teaching, to include the support and encouragement of vulnerable young people, such as LAC.

In April 2011 the pupil premium was introduced – additional funding for publicly funded schools in England to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and close the gap between them and their peers. The grant allocation for LAC must be managed by the designated Virtual School Head (VSH) in the authority that looks after those children to be used for the benefit of the LAC's educational needs as described in their Personal Education Plan (PEP). The VSH should ensure there are arrangements in place to discuss with the child's education setting – usually with the designated teacher – how the child will benefit from any pupil premium funding. It is the role of the VSH and schools designated teacher to promote the educational achievement and psychosocial outcomes of LAC in their care (DfE, 2014).

Social workers, however, were largely absent from the accounts of young people, particularly in earlier school years; one young person made reference to the practical support provided by social workers during their post-compulsory education, examples included, provision of resources and financial help, although largely, limited references of support from social workers related to living arrangements and independent living.

The duty to promote the educational achievement of a looked after children extends to looked after young people aged 16 or 17 preparing to leave care. Duties set out in the Children and Families Act (2014) highlight the responsibility of LAs and other professionals for making links with further education colleges and higher education institutions to ensure that care leavers are supported to find establishments that understand and work to meet the needs of looked after children and care leavers (DfE, 2014). Moreover, the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund, which was introduced in 2011, is money the government has given to local authorities, schools, colleges and other education and training providers to support disadvantaged students. Its purpose is to provide financial support to help students overcome specific barriers to participation, so they can remain in education and support for the transition to adulthood (Education Funding Agency, 2015.

Many of the issues that have emerged from this current thesis regarding encouragement, support and high expectations have considerable implications for how the Children and Families Bill (2014) is implemented. The findings are helpful to professionals working with LAC and care leavers, to develop deeper insights into their practical, financial and psycho social needs as they undertake the transition to adulthood.

5.3.3.3 Value of education

In addition to the more general support discussed above, young people in the study made reference to particular aspects of support from carers and teachers for educational participation. Consistent with Craddock (2008), four young people in care acknowledged efforts made by their foster carers and teachers as key contributing factors to their educational achievements or educational recovery. Four of the young people made reference to the time and effort they received from carers regarding supporting them with their education; carers who valued education and who encouraged young people in their care to achieve, were found to be key components to attaining positive educational outcomes for LAC; this supports previous research by Cameron et al, (2010).

Cameron et al (2010) argued that the educational backgrounds and abilities of carers are significant to the amount of educational support they can provide. They found that despite efforts made by carers of ensuring school attendance and attending school events, the educational potential of young people in their care was, in many cases, limited by carers own low level of education and unfamiliarity with college and university systems. One young person in this current thesis reported having a foster parent who had attended university as useful for providing practical advice, as well as acting as a role model.

Consistent with Sinclair and Gibbs, (1998), eight of the young people in the study reported a limited or lack of support and encouragement from birth parents for their education. Generally, birth parents were described as not valuing education or promoting school attendance; one young person recalls his mother preventing him from going to school so that he would be available to look after the younger children and carry out household jobs. However, exceptions were found amongst the two young unaccompanied asylum seekers, for which the value and importance of education was encouraged. Nevertheless, despite the influence of having carers who value education and recognise its importance, LAC are a heterogeneous population with a range of factors influencing outcomes.

5.3.3.4 Hobbies and outside interests

Five of young people made reference to their involvement in informal sources of support through voluntary work, social and leisure activities. This appeared to be closely linked to more positive educational outcomes and a stronger commitment to learning. This reflects findings from previous research (Darling, 2005) that such activities can encourage a sense of self as a learner and promote continuing educational participation amongst care leavers.

Disadvantaged young people often experience considerable difficulty accessing formal education and employment, due to a lack of qualifications, learning fatigue and disengagement with education, caused by overwhelming life difficulties (Cameron et al, 2010). Studies have found that informal learning and leisure activities are important facilitators in improving the educational and employment of disadvantaged young people. The young people in this current thesis that demonstrated outside interests and hobbies tended to be more focused on their learning and appeared to have a greater sense of what

they were hoping to achieve educationally. McGivney (1999) notes that opportunities for engaging in community based informal learning and activities is significant in broadening participation amongst young people who are economically, socially and educationally disadvantaged.

Further research has found that the benefits of social and leisure activities extend beyond positive educational outcomes. Studies have demonstrated that spare time activities can enhance young people's social skills and social networks and improve their self-efficacy and self-esteem (Gilligan 1999). Smith and Carlson (1997) suggest that social and leisure interests and activities provide opportunities to marginalized young people, such as LAC, to join or re-join the mainstream. Moreover, Fong, Schwab and Armour (2006) found that leisure activities and social experiences influenced adjustment and well-being for LAC. For children and young people lacking stability and consistency in relationships, owing to being in care and who experience frequent placement moves and relationship breakdown, continuity of social and leisure activities can be a useful form of normalization and may help buffer children from the negative effects of relationship disruption and insecure attachment (Cameron et al, 2010). The findings highlight the need for carers, teachers, social workers and policy makers to recognise and harness the potential benefits of social and leisure interests and activities relative to informal learning and educational attainment. Promoting the interests and skills of young people in and leaving care, should be of key importance to carers and professionals.

5.3.3.5 Post compulsory education

The system of educational qualifications in England is complex and none more than at the upper secondary level, which neither completely separates vocational from academic routes and qualifications, allowing for many possibilities for choice. Few young people in the study were able to follow the traditional academic route to higher education at age 18; many did not achieve the necessary qualifications at age 16 to enable them to proceed along this trajectory and some experienced a number of complications and difficulties during their schooling lives, delaying this process.

Two young people (both asylum seekers) had gone straight from GCSEs to 'A' levels at age 18 and on to university with no delays. A further young person entered university at age 20 after a two year delay, having successfully completed his first two years at the point of

interview. Two young people were hoping to progress to university, but one had experienced delays, due to having to retake A 'levels to gain better grades. A further young person was completing her GCSEs and was hoping to progress onto A' levels and then university.

Some young people did not have adequate GCSEs to progress further in their education; in such cases, three chose to undertake vocational qualifications at a lower level than GCSEs, consequently introducing delays to educational progress. Two finished compulsory education with minimum or no qualifications and then embarked on courses at various levels with no direct route into higher education. They typically had many disruptions, early departures from courses and restarts, sometimes following a different route. Cameron et al (2010) suggests that this 'yo yo-ing' between educational courses is characteristic of those young people with no immediate ambition to enter higher education and who are usually experiencing difficulties in other areas of their lives.

These educational pathways map out the various different routes through the post compulsory educational system in England, pursued by young people in this current thesis. What is clear is that progression through an academic route is not always simple and is often compounded by various challenges and obstacles. Cameron et al (2010) argues that delays in educational advancement are often owing to background characteristics and poor educational choices and advice, rather than planned delays such as a gap year before university. Four young people in this current thesis embarked on vocational qualifications that were not as high-status as academic ones, reducing their chances of going to university. Three young people reported having dropped out of their post-16 educational courses and training; this was often due to reasons such as difficulties in managing the transition to independence and coping with everyday living, including financial difficulties, learning fatigue, change of placement or pregnancy. Nevertheless, despite these difficulties, they demonstrated a strong commitment to and interest in education, which as previously mentioned is not typical of LAC in general.

The Children and Families Act (2014) has the aim of improving and supporting the process of transition to adulthood. Whilst a formal academic career path is not for everyone, the act should ensure that LAC and care leavers are helped to select the correct course to enable them to start on the correct pathway to a desired and appropriate pathway. The new Act is also helping to encourage further education providers and the wider professional support systems to plan appropriate support for young people as they move from school and begin to develop their learning and wider adult life skills (DfE, 2014).

5.3.3.6 Financial incentives

The passage of transition from care to independence brings with it many challenges and complications. Having to cope with everyday living; living alone, cooking and cleaning and managing finances, young people often struggle with the prospect of continuing into further and higher education. Leaving home has been found to be a strong predictor of poverty (Aasave, Davia, Lacovou, and Mazzuco, 2005), particularly for those leaving home early to live alone. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and subsequent legislation makes clear young people's entitlement to financial support and accommodation; in some cases additional financial and practical support are available for those in education (Cameron, Banko and Pierce, 2006).

All young people in the study were reliant on public financial support. The extent to which, was dependent on whether they were in higher education, further education or NEET. Those in further and higher education were entitled to greater financial support, than young people not in education. For all of the young people this financial support made it possible for them to continue with their education (where previously this would have not been possible); for others, additional financial support was their incentive for progressing onto further education. Financial incentives for learning were not mentioned in the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, although Merdinger, Hines, Osterling and Wyatt, (2005) reported that the availability of financial support was instrumental in decisions to attend college. For many young people in this current thesis, paid employment was an important aspect of their lives, as many care leavers struggle financially (Cameron et al, 2006); for those in education, paid employment further supplemented the income they were already receiving. A concern however is that while many LAC feel compelled to start courses to secure additional income, they are rarely offered adequate support to plan a clear trajectory to a career pathway. In order for LAC to succeed in further and higher education they require access to a wide range of support; the new legislation should therefore help to form adequate professional networks to cater for financial, practical, emotional and learning support to be provided in a more timely way.

5.3.4 Theme 4: Negotiating Challenging Systems

5.3.4.1 Stability vs instability

Young people described mixed reports regarding their stability of care and placement. All those in the study had experienced at least one placement change, with many encountering moves of between three and ten; one care leaver reported moving more than twenty times. Consistent with previous research reported in Chapter 2 (O'Sullivan and Westerman, 2007), placement changes often resulted from disagreements or 'fights' with staff members (in residential settings) and peers; temporary foster placements and carers not wanting to look after those in their care past a particular age. Those in residential care or mixed placements (family base and residential), were seen to endure an increased number of placement moves than those in purely foster care placements, resulting in increased disruption to schooling and frequently significant periods out of school. Moreover, young people who had experienced numerous placements or a mixture of placements were less likely to have educational qualifications or make significant educational progress; one care leaver NEET reported encountering more than ten care moves, frequently resulting in a change of school. Frequently reported in previous research is the relationship between the number of care moves and school and educational qualifications gained (Fletcher-Campbell et al, 2003). Evidence has repeatedly demonstrated that stability and continuity are essential contributors to ensuring that LAC achieve educational success; early onset of and long-term foster placements have been directly linked to educational success and higher educational achievement (Cameron, 2007). Young people in the study holding qualifications and those who had gone to university from care or whose educational trajectories planned for university attendance had less placement changes and longer-term foster care placements. For example, one young person in care reported encountering two long-term placements (and remains in contact with her first foster family); she is currently in further education and is planning to continue onto higher education.

Three young people in this current thesis reported that maintaining friendships was extremely difficult, due to living a long distance from the friends they had made and the leisure activities they had been involved in. One young person spoke openly about the loss of his friendships and the difficulty of forming new friends, due to the number of care placement and school changes. While the impact of instability of care and frequency of moves upon young people's leisure and social lives was not mentioned in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, Hedin et al. (2011) reported that young people in their study highlighted the need to interact with peers and emphasised the supportive role they provide. It has been suggested that the development of supportive friendships may be affected by others' knowledge of the LAC's care status: five of the 80 young people interviewed by

Harker et al. (2003) suggested that they would benefit from their school friends gaining an understanding of what it meant to be looked after. Hedin et al. (2011) concludes that just as with non-LAC, peer relationships may be vital in forming the identity of a LAC; the development of wider supportive networks, including peer support is an important dimension of psychosocial support during adolescence and is vital to ensuring positive educational and life outcomes.

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5.3.4.2 Absence from school

Research reviewed in Chapter 2, examining the educational outcomes of LAC draw attention to the high proportions of young people experiencing absence from school compared with the general school population (SEU, 2003). Four young people in this current thesis reported periods out of school, with some experiencing periods of between 3 months to 2 years. Reasons for these absences included; families that did not encourage regular attendance at school, volatile home environments and resulting crises and disruptions, parental sickness and incapacity due to alcohol or drug dependency. Further disruptions to their education were movements in care and school placements, often occurring at critical moments in their secondary education. School exclusions were reported by some as reasons for short periods out of school and often caused significant disruptions to their learning. It is clear that school, although equally as important is the disruption it causes to psychosocial support from relationships with peers and professionals, which as a consequence may contribute to an escalating pattern of non-attendance and instability. This finding is consistent with the wider literature around school exclusion for LAC, which suggests that they are at least ten times more likely to be excluded from school than children not in care (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). Hojer et al (2008) noted that the probability of returning to mainstream school or achieving any qualifications is significantly reduced following an exclusion. Two unaccompanied asylum seekers reported experiences out of school in the UK and in their home country, owing to chaotic and unstable conditions in their countries of origin and long delays of getting into school once they arrived in the UK.

5.3.4.3 Life experience impacting on education

As frequently observed in the research literature (Francis, 2000) few young people in the current thesis experienced a smooth passage through school and into post-compulsory education; for many of them school was viewed as a refuge from their complex family circumstances, although regular attendance was rarely possible. Their disordered

backgrounds, punctuated by frequent crises and sudden changes in family structure, made it hard for them to focus on schoolwork and ensure regular attendance. For six, coming into care provided stability and a more structured lifestyle enabling them to focus on their work and create opportunities for successful learning. However, for others it resulted in a series of placement changes and subsequent disruptions to school attendance and progression.

Consistent with research carried out by Francis (2000), four of the young people described unhappy or mixed experiences of school and care life, owing to foster and residential carers showing little or no interest in promoting their educational attainment and only a few teachers and other professionals providing them with help and support. One care leaver spoke openly about the struggles he experienced once in care regarding his relationship with different carers; these challenges significantly impacted his ability to focus on his school work. With a few exceptions, notably school teachers and individuals working in the leaving care teams and a small minority of foster carers, system support was absent or could even be a negative influence on young people's educational ambitions. These responses reflect findings in the literature reviewed in Chapter Two (Cameron et al, 2010). Cameron et al, (2010) noted that professional agencies and carers generally did not provide a reliable alternative source of support or offer sufficient understanding for the emotional trauma and loss experienced by the majority of the young people. A recurring theme permeating the accounts of five of the young people in this current thesis was the awareness of a 'turning point' at some late stage in their school career, when they recognised that education was there best chance of positively changing their lives. Opportunities to overcome their challenging life experiences seemed closely related to feelings of self-efficacy, as described by Gilligan (2009); the belief that one can determine their own life outcomes. He suggests that self-efficacy can be increased through opportunities to contribute and to take responsibility for decisions affecting their lives. For example, one young person in this thesis demonstrated increased self-efficacy in making the decision to modify his behaviour and life choices for the better, for the purpose of 'turning his life around' and improving his life outcomes,

5.3.4.4 Difficult relationships

Consistent with research carried out by Harker et al (2004), the absence of a supportive and significant adult had a negative impact on the educational outcomes of four of the young

people in the study. While some reported positive relationships with carers, teachers and other professionals, there were three accounts of unsatisfactory care placements, some involving neglect and ill-treatment. One care leaver spoke candidly about the difficult relationship he had with his foster carer, the absence of love in the relationship and his resulting feelings of sadness. Attachment theorists suggest that those whose early relationships resulted in insecure attachments, owing to overwhelming preoccupations and high levels of stress and distress in the primary carer, with implications for neglect of the child or possibly actual harm; these insecure attachment patterns have significant implications for young people in terms of their behaviour, ability to establish and develop future relationships, manage their emotions and succeed in their education, in the absence of a 'secure base' (Geddes, 2009). Considering this, it is possible that those young people in the study that struggled to form positive relationships with their carers, may be a result of their attachment patterns and the absence of a secure base. This may also be further exacerbated by the frequent moves of care and education setting, which disrupt numerous relationships and support systems.

Five young people noted a lack of support and encouragement for their education, with some carers demonstrating little interest in their schooling. What was lacking from some carers and care placements was an understanding that educational support was an essential part of their role. Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) argue that carers are best placed to provide support and encouragement for the education of those in their care; encouraging school attendance, help with reading and other homework, attending parents' evenings and school events and advocating extra-curricular activities can significantly contribute towards positive educational outcomes.

Low expectations and a lack of encouragement for education by teacher, school staff and carers, were also present in the narratives of five young people and was found to have a negative impact on their learning and educational outcomes. One young person noted that his foster parents were unkind to him, would call him names and make comments such as "you'll never make it". Another suggested that carers seemed to lack interest in her education; the absence of a parental figure that set firm boundaries and encouraged her with her education was apparent. These findings are consistent with research reviewed in the literature in Chapter 2 (Harker et al, 2004; Craddock, 2008). Craddock (2008) further noted that young people's accounts were often characterised by poor relationships with teachers and pupils, learning difficulties not suitably attended to and a general disengagement with

education. Low expectations and a lack of support and guidance were also found amongst other professionals. Five young people reported insufficient support from social services with regards to educational and career advice and guidance on planning ahead, including, CVs, job applications and advice and support with work experience. This lack of support and low expectations significantly impacted their educational outcomes. Absent from the lives of some young people was a significant person who was able to support and advocate for their education and achievement. Previous research has noted similar findings (Harker et al, 2004). Jackson et al (1998) highlighted the difficulties identified by young people in gaining appropriate and helpful career guidance. The Children and Families Act (2014) emphasises the role that the local authorities and school's play in supporting the educational needs of LAC and makes clear the wide range of support and professional networks needed to cater for the financial, practical, emotional and learning support of LAC. The impact of low expectations was further demonstrated by Cameron et al, (2010); young people noted the lack of adequate advice from social services with regards to educational pathways, resulting in them choosing the wrong course or direction. Dearden (2004) explored the concept of 'expectations' in relation to the hopes and aspirations of LAC. He found that the positive expectations of others, significantly contributed to young people's belief that they would be able to achieve their plans. Furthermore, resilient young people were more likely to report higher expectations of them, by teachers and carers.

5.3.4.5 Lack of discipline/boundaries

Although the area of discipline and boundaries were given little attention in the literature review, four young people in the study made reference to the lack of structure and discipline they received from carers and professionals. Their narratives suggested that carers and teachers did not impose strict rules and/or boundaries for them to adhere to. Consequently, much of their behaviour was disruptive and challenging. One young person reported missing school and choosing instead to hang out with friends and participate in anti-social behaviour; she noted the absence of any strict boundaries or discipline in place to manage this behaviour. Studies have demonstrated that structure and routines provide a sense of normalisation for young people in care and can further harness their educational interest and success and consequently enhance resilience (Jackson et al, 2007). Hedin, Höjer, and Brunnberg (2011) found that structure and routine within the care environment encouraged feelings of security both at home and in school. It would seem fair to suggest therefore that the provision of boundaries and consequences would encourage LAC to have increased

control over their emotions and behaviour. Clearly carers are in a challenging position having to manage the emotions and behavioural responses of LAC, who may have experienced trauma, stressful life events and the lack of strong relationships. This highlights an area for further development.

5.3.4.6 Challenging systems

Consistent with research reviewed in Chapter 2 (Fletcher-Campbell, 1990), some young people reported a lack of support and effort made by social services to meet their needs and 'listen' to their views. For two young people, the failure of social services to remove them from their disordered and disturbing home situations, despite repeated attempts by the young person to notify them of their situation, was significant; in both cases, they resorted to seeking advice and support from school staff, in the hope of making a change.

In recent years, questions regarding the age and stage at which a child should enter care, if at all, has been debated. More recently, the number of children entering care has risen, from approximately 58,000 in 2000 to around 68,000 in 2013. It is possible that this rise, in part, is a reaction to cases of children, such as Baby Peter, who experienced severe neglect and abuse from his parents, whilst being known to health and social services (Cameron et al, 2010). Studies have demonstrated more positive care experiences and greater outcomes for LAC, following early intervention and minimum delay (Hannon, Wood and Bazalgette, 2010). Moreover, suggestions for children to be taken into care at an earlier stage to prevent the continuing abuse and neglect of children have been made (Hannon et al, 2010) and would reflect the views of young people in this current thesis.

Further comments made by six young people, was the lack of communication and practical support they received from social services regarding their transition to independence. Two young people, at the end of their compulsory schooling, reported being unsure as to what facilities and resources were available to them once they leave school. The Children and Families Act (2014) stipulates that LAs and other professionals should support young people in their transition to adulthood; this includes promoting their educational achievement – making clear what services, training, further and/or higher education and employment and funding are available to them. The time at which a young person makes the transition to

independence can be particularly stressful; compounded by a lack of support and guidance from significant adults resulted in some experiencing additional stress and concern regarding whether they were making the best decisions about their future.

5.4. Methodological issues

5.4.1 Methodological strengths

This current thesis enabled young people from a care background, an under-researched population, to communicate their views and for these views to be considered by LA members; possibilities for incorporating their views into LA practice were realised.

Notwithstanding the relatively small sample size, young people provided a rich and detailed insight into their experiences of the care system and its impact on their educational experiences and outcomes. A flexible approach was adopted. Interviews were conducted at a place and time that suited the young people. As previously noted, there is a need for research to enable LAC to voice their views and opinions, consequently the questions in the interview schedule were broad. The use of semi-structured interviews enabled the young people to explore their most pertinent issues, whilst also considering more general experiences in greater depth; further enhancing the reliability of their accounts (Robson, 2002). The rapport that developed between the researcher and the young person provided greater opportunity for positive participation; as interviews were carried out by the same interviewer, this provided a degree of consistency for the delivery of interviews (Creswell, 2009).

The findings of the study support and further expand on previous research by providing a greater understanding of the factors that contribute and/or hinder the educational experiences and subsequent outcomes of these young people. For example, they highlighted the importance of self-motivation and the belief in their ability to achieve their goals; they valued the support and encouragement and high expectations of others and the knowledge that there was a significant person in their lives who 'loved' and cared for them and in their ability to succeed. Many young people reported feelings of loneliness and rejection; the desire for boundaries and discipline was highlighted by some– emphasizing

the importance of the 'corporate parent'. By exploring the views and experiences of the young people in this current thesis, it has been possible to identify a number of individual and contextual factors that impact the educational outcomes of young people from a care background.

To summarise, the methodology adopted in the study allowed for a wide range of experiences to surface. The in-depth interviews provided new in-sight into the individual and contextual factors impacting on the educational experiences and outcomes of these young people.

5.4.2 Methodological limitations

The current study highlights the difficulties of engaging young people from a care background. Kendrick, Steckley, and Lerpiniere (2008) note that the process of gaining access to young people from a care background, can be lengthy and may involve numerous negotiations with various people. This was particularly true of this current thesis, for which the consent of various senior members of staff within children's services and social workers had to be gained; often requiring numerous telephone calls and emails to gain consent and arrange interviews. Bogolub and Thomas (2005) describe making between 9 -14 telephone calls to each child's social worker, in order to arrange interviews. For this current thesis, between 3 -10 telephone calls or emails were made to each child's (in care) social workers and Head of Service. Previous research has explored the notion of 'gatekeepers' when examining the challenges of carrying out research with LAC (Kendrick et al, 2008). Masson (2002) notes that while they function to protect vulnerable young people, their behaviour, as a consequence, also limits the opportunity for young people to voice their views and opinions.

The sample consisted of slightly more care leavers than young people in care; this is primarily due to the difficulties of accessing young people in care, for the reasons previously discussed. Thus, it is possible that this current thesis represents the views and perspectives of young people from a later developmental stage and those who had had more opportunities to reflect on their earlier experiences. The sample was further limited by the relatively small total number of young people from a care background in both Boroughs; this meant that the field of recruitment was fairly limited. Due to the limitations of this current thesis, it is questionable as to whether the findings can be generalised to the wider

population of young people from a care background. Gilligan (2008) highlights the dangers of generalising from the experiences of LAC, due to the risk of grouping these young people with fixed characteristics and experiences. Nevertheless, it is well documented that it is often difficult to gain access to this group (Murray, 2005) and this was noted during the first meeting with the LA; consequently this was given consideration when devising the research design.

The timeframe for which to carry out the study meant that it was only possible to conduct one interview with the young people. Hence, the views reported reflect their experiences at a particular moment in time. Future studies, carried out over a longer period of time, would ensure that the views of young people are acquired at different stages in their educational careers. For example, a longitudinal study would determine whether they were able to achieve their hopes and aspirations and the possible factors facilitating or inhibiting these. Moreover, exploration into the views and perspectives of carers and professional most closely linked to the young people would provide further insight into their educational experiences and outcomes.

5.5 Implications for practice for the Educational Psychologist and Local authority

5.5.1 Implications of findings for the Educational Psychologist

Many of the issues that have emerged from this current thesis have considerable implications for how the Children and Families Bill (2014) is implemented. The findings are helpful to professionals, including educational psychologists, working with LAC and care leavers to develop deeper insights into their practical, financial and psychosocial needs, as they undertake their transition to adulthood.

The introduction of the Children and Families Bill (2014) sees opportunities for the work and role of the Educational Psychologist. Findings indicate that young people value the opportunity to put their views across and reflect on past experiences, to gain a more coherent and clear understanding, whilst also developing their resilience and self-reliance. EPs are able to draw upon interventions and techniques to support children and young people identify personal constructs, tackle negative self-perceptions and assumptions about themselves, enabling them to work towards their goals and aspirations. The voice of the

child was a key focus of this current thesis and EPs are perfectly placed to explore the views and personal experiences of children and young people. Moreover, EP support now extends to young people aged 25. EPs are therefore in a position to support young people in the transition to further and higher education; this may include, assisting in the selection of the right courses that lead to desired career outcomes and career pathways; young people in this thesis reported a lack of support and advice in selecting educational courses, which often led to disappointment or 'dropping out' of the course.

It will be important that EPs explore with young people their hopes and desires and assist schools, professionals and carers with their transition and in realising their aspirations. EPs are in a position to support further education colleges, to ensure that educational support is in place for the start of their studies, that access to bursaries and funds are organised and that psycho-social support for the emotional needs of these young people is available during the transition. Three of the young people in this thesis described feelings of loneliness, particularly during this period of transitioning from school to adult life. It will therefore be important for EPs to support further education and higher education colleges on the importance of meeting the mental health needs of these young people during this uncertain time.

EPs have an important responsibility to assess and evaluate the emotional needs of LAC and the potential impact that these needs may have on their ability to learn and achieve; it is vital that EPs communicate with professionals, further education and higher education colleges and where appropriate refer to services for additional support and intervention, such as mental health services. EP's often work as part of multi-disciplinary teams and are able to use their skills and knowledge to contribute and make suggestions regarding the needs of children and young people and the necessary support required to ensure that they progress and achieve positive outcomes.

EPs are now involved in supporting young people up to 25 years. It will be important for EPs to make links with Further Education Colleges and Higher Education Institutions to ensure that they understand and work to meet the needs of LAC and care leavers. This can be achieved by delivering training for professionals around the learning, emotional and other needs associated with the transition to adulthood. Moreover, EPs can inform the transition from school to Further Education College and should prioritise this group for EP involvement at this stage.

EPs are in a position to work at various levels in the education system, including individual work with young people, group level work with young people and adults and at an organisational level. EPs are best placed to consider the various systemic factors impacting on a child and young person and assist appropriately. A report by the British Psychological Society Division of Educational and Child Psychology (DECP, 2006) suggests that EPs are able to bring their understanding of child development, the ways in which children and young people learn and engage in education, knowledge of emotional well-being, behaviour management and listening skills, to working with LAC. Given their skills and knowledge of psychology, EPs are well placed to work and communicate effectively with children and young people using techniques such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and are able to explain to those working with these young people why they feel and behave the way they do.

The Children and Families Bill (2014) highlights the importance of involving children and young people in decisions about their education and with the support that they receive. Young people in this current thesis commented on the lack of engagement by professionals in meeting their educational needs both in school and in their transition to adult life. One young person in this thesis suggested that her reasons for acting out was in part, a result of her learning difficulties not being appropriately addressed. Researchers have emphasised the important role that EPs have in assessing the educational needs of LAC, to ensure that their needs are appropriately addressed and supported. Jackson and McParlin (2006) suggest that when children enter the care system, a comprehensive assessment should be carried out by an EP, to guarantee that their educational and psychological needs are identified and supported. Honey, Rees and Griffey (2011) suggests that EPs are equipped to support children and young people through programmes of individual work, given their skills and knowledge. During this process, it is important that EPs work in partnership with parents, carers and school staff, to identify and implement strategies of support (DECP, 2006)

EPs are able to promote the educational and emotional wellbeing of LAC, for example through regular planning meetings in school. During such meetings, EPs are able to work closely with professionals to explore concerns, ensure that the progress of these children is being made and appropriate provision is in place. Gilligan (2001) suggests that EPs are able to use such opportunities to encourage a greater understanding of the concept of resilience and explore possible opportunities for schools to develop resilience in children and young people, through support, encouragement and participation in education and informal learning and activities. It is possible that this can be achieved using Pupil Premium Funds. LAC who

have been looked after for six months are eligible for the Pupil Premium. The Pupil Premium is additional funding given to publicly funded schools in England to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and close the gap between them and their peers (DfE 2014). EPs are able to advise schools on how best to use their pupil premium to support the needs of LAC and improve their educational outcomes.

The findings of this current thesis suggest that encouragement, support and high expectations of LAC, with regards to their learning and educational prospects, can help to foster motivation and a sense of purpose. Engaging in conversations with young people about their education and educational outlook, exploring their educational aspirations and devising a plan for achieving these are crucial to enabling them to realise their potential and achieve success. It is vital that professionals explore the skills and interests of children and young people, to further expand on them and increase their desire to succeed. EPs are able to carry out whole-school training sessions, borough wide, focusing on promoting the educational achievements of young people in care. The findings in this current thesis suggest that schools, carers and social workers, would benefit from a greater understanding of the needs of LAC and the care system, in addition to being more informed about the factors that promote and hinder educational success. EPs should take advantage of opportunities for working closely with designated teachers. Young people in the study often noted that their views and feelings were not being heard; designated teachers and social workers therefore have an important role in ensuring that the views of young people are considered and that they are able to contribute to decisions about their educational trajectories.

5.5.2   Implication of findings for the local authority and for future research

As Children's Services continue to work closely with schools, it is necessary that the LA considers how best to implement effective provision for LAC. Many of the findings in the current research are consistent with previous research, as demonstrated in section 5.3. This therefore brings into question what is being done to tackle these issues. Key recommendations arising from the current research include:

- The needs of young people up to age 25 years should be considered. Ensuring that they receive the necessary support to continue with the education, transition to independence and secure suitable employment is essential. It is essential that young people are made

aware of new entitlements; the need for this to be embedded in practice is important. Moreover, providing statutory protections comparable to those currently associated with a statement of SEN to up to 25 in further education for LAC with SEN.

- Communication and joint-working between care and education professionals must be improved to assist in the planning of placements and developing a better understanding of the needs and experiences of LAC. Teachers and school staff should have a greater understanding of the care system, so too should social services be better informed about education; this should form part of their initial training and continuing professional development . Moreover, effective and joined up practice will be crucial for meeting the SEN of LAC. The development of a specialist EP role for looked-after children is a promising move towards increased communication between services

- Virtual School Heads (VSH) have a duty to champion the education of LAC and to provide additional support to LAC in schools, in order to ensure that these children have equal to their peers. The end of Year 11 is an important transition point for all children and young people. LAC are particularly vulnerable at times of transition and change. It is therefore essential that The Virtual School work with other agencies and services to ensure that looked after children achieve a smooth transition from the end of Year 11 into further education, training or employment, including apprenticeships; identifying and supporting their ongoing needs is crucial.

- A detailed educational assessment should be carried out when a child comes into care and intensive catch-up support and help should be made available at the earliest opportunity

- Greater-attention should be given to the first care placement, in order to encourage stability of placement, avoid delay in engaging or re-engaging in education and promote the development and maintenance of safe and supportive relationships. This study has noted the hard to reach nature of LAC and the barriers to recruitment, for example social workers acting as 'gatekeepers' and difficulties engaging and retaining LAC in the study. It is essential that access to LAC be made so that they are able to voice their views and opinions; this can inform policy and practice.

- Education and care plans should be coordinated to create maximum possible stability and continuity.

- Young people in care will benefit from various types of support, including emotional support from those who have an understanding of their experiences of being in care, the provision of practical resources and the availability of a significant adult who will take an interest in their education.

- Placement moves should be limited to support the development and maintenance of safe and supportive relationships. Attention should be given to familial relationships, in particular those with siblings, and the importance of sustaining friendships should not be undervalued. Opportunities to develop new and existing relationships can increase the availability of role models, who in turn can shape the identities of LAC. Informal learning and leisure activities should be encouraged, to promote social relationships and support, provide work experience, qualifications and income.

- A key aspect of the role of foster and residential carers should be to promote the educational achievement of those in their care; this should be given much more emphasis in recruitment, training and supervision. Carers that are not able to provide in turn educational support should receive additional support and guidance from qualified teachers.

- Children and young people should have the opportunity to be involved in making decisions about their lives and learning experiences, so that they have a sense of control over their lives.

- Support in accessing further and higher education should be made available by teachers and social workers; it is essential that young people know what resources and systems of support are available to them. Choice of course and career too should be an on-going discussion.

- This current thesis has provided new insights and understanding of the lived experiences of LAC using qualitative methods of research. Examples of areas that would benefit from more in-depth exploration include; turning points in the lives of LAC, research studies that encourage the participation of LAC and seek their views and experiences through discussions and interviews; research with young people leaving care making the transition to further education and higher education – those who remain with carers for

longer periods of time; compare the experiences of LAC under the old and new regimes; support groups for young people who have left care giving support to those who are still in care.

5.6 Summary and conclusions

This current thesis has provided a detailed insight into the lives and educational experiences of ten young people from a care background and further contributes to a wider understanding of their educational careers. While efforts have been made to improve the educational outcomes of children and young people in care since 1998, there still remains a gap between the educational achievements and opportunities of young people in care when compared with their peers.

The findings of this current thesis have provided a greater understanding of the factors that facilitate and/or hinder educational success – or be it the inter-relationship of these factors that appear to contribute to positive educational outcomes; factors such as the importance of significant relationships and types of support, resilience and self-reliance, stability and the value of education were highlighted positively by the young people. For those able to succeed in accessing further and higher education, their passage through school and into further and/or higher education was often riddled with tremendous difficulty and met by numerous obstacles. Hence, the important role that EPs, schools, social services and other professionals have in supporting the educational careers of young people is further highlighted in this research.

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Appendix I: Interview Schedule

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the study. As I have previously mentioned, this current thesis is looking at the educational experiences of young people who have been in care and those about to leave care. I am particularly interested in gaining an understanding of your educational experiences before and after you went into care and how this has affected your life generally.

Today I would like to hear about your educational experiences before and after you came into care and what possible things affected your educational experience. I am also interested to hear about how you have been getting on since you left school/home or how you feel about having to leave school and/or home. I have got some questions that I want to run through with you. They are quite straightforward, but if there are any you don't want to answer that is fine, just let me know. Also if you feel you want to stop the interview at any time, that's OK, just tell me.

Confidentiality

I should stress that everything you tell me will be treated as confidential; neither your name nor your contact details will be revealed to anyone.

Recording

I would like to record what you are saying so that I can concentrate on the interview and don't have to make too many notes. Would you mind if I do this? All recordings will be destroyed at the end of the project.

Do you have any questions that you would like to ask? Can you confirm that you understand about the study and agree to the interview?

Section One   Personal background

I'd like to start by asking you a bit about your personal background – the amount of detail you provide is up to you.

Personal details

1.1 Gender…………Age…….……D.O.B………….Ethnicity…………..

1.2 Can you describe what you are mainly doing at the moment with regards to education and/or employment?

1.3 Have you any educational qualifications or done any job training?

1.4 What are your current living arrangements?

1.5 How long have you been in your current place? How much have you moved over the past few years?

1.6 Do you have any physical or learning disabilities or chronic conditions?

1.7 (For young people still in care) What are your plans for next year?

Section Two   Care history

OK. Now I would like to find out a bit about your life when you were growing up.

2.1. Can you tell me about how many years you were/have been in care for? *(Explore moves, circumstances of living and degree of stability during childhood)*

2.2. If you have left care, how long has it been since you were in care?

Section Three   **Educational Experience**

Now let's talk about your educational experience and the schools you attended.

3.1. Can you tell me, in general, about your school experience? For example, what schools you went to and any changes of school and why? *(explore school moves, stability of schooling, distance from home)*

Section Four   **Pre-care educational experiences**

I would now like to talk to you about what your educational experience was like before you came into care.

4.1. Thinking back to your school experience before coming into care – can you tell me about how you were getting on in school then?

4.2. Was there anything going on in your life at that time that may have affected your school experience?

4.3. What was your attitude towards learning at that time? Were you motivated to do well or not? If yes what was it that motivated you and if no, why did you feel unmotivated?

4.4. What were your expectations and the expectations of others in terms of your school experience at this time? *(Encouragement, specific people, work space)*

Section Five   **Educational experience while in care**

OK, so we have talked about your educational experience before coming into care, I would now like you to tell me about you educational experience whilst you were in care.

5.1. Can you think about your school experiences after coming into care? How did this affect your schooling? Were you motivated to do well or not? I yes what was it that motivated you and if no, why did you feel unmotivated? *(explore specific people, encouragement, friends)*

5.2. What were you expectations and the expectations of others in terms of your school experience at this time?

5.3. Can you think of anything specific that helped you as far as your schooling was concerned, in terms of getting on and doing as well as you could have? Please give examples.

5.4. If things didn't go so well for you, can you think of anything specific that made it harder for you and stopped you doing as well as you might have. Please give examples.

5.5. looking back are there any people in particular that you can think of that made a difference for you, as far as getting on at school? Who were they and how did they make a difference?

Section Six   Experiences after leaving school

(These questions are only to be carried out on those young people who have left care)

I have a few questions now about your experiences sine leaving school.

6.1. How old were you when you left school?

6.2. How did you feel at the point when you left school? *(Support from services, financial worries, housing, education)*

6.3 What opportunities were made available to you at that time?

6.4. What about moving into adult life, were there people that helped or hindered that move? If so can you give examples of who and how they may have helped or hindered that process?

6.5. Do you think your educational experiences made any difference to how you got on with moving into independence?

6.6. Has doing well or poorly in school made life harder or easier for you now? *(motivation, encouragement, support)*

6.7. Have you continued with any education since leaving school, or do you have any plans to? Have you experienced any difficulties or do you envisage any difficulties in continuing with you education?

6.8. Can you give some suggestions for how things could be improved for educating children in care? What would make a difference?

Section Seven   Experiences of leaving school

(These questions are only to be carried out on those young people still in care)

I have a few questions now about how you are feeling now that you are about to leave school.

7.1. You are about to leave care – how do you feel about leaving school? *(financial worries, housing, support services)*

7.2. What opportunities have been made available to you in terms of moving on?

7.3. Can you think of anyone who has been particularly helpful in preparing you for adult life and leaving school?

7.4. Do you think your educational experience has made any difference to how you feel about leaving school and moving to independence?

7.5. Do you plan to continue with any education once you leave school?

7.6. Do you envisage any difficulties with continuing with you education? *(finance, housing)*

7.7. Can you give some suggestions for how things could be improved for educating children in care? What would make a difference?

Appendix II: Information sheet

Educational experiences of young people in care

My name is Susan Beenstock and I work with young people in the Borough. I am carrying out a piece of research about the educational experiences of young people in care and I am very interested in hearing your views and opinions on how things can be improved for young people in care.

What is this research about?

The government have been working to try to improve things for children in care and are keen to hear what children and young people have to say. I am really interested to find out about your educational experiences and how these experiences have influenced your life decisions. I am hoping to find out information on what can be done to improve the educational experiences of young people in care. I hope this information will be used to help the services in the Borough improve things for young people in the future.

What are we doing?

We want to talk to young people about to leave care and care leavers to find out about your educational experiences and future educational/employment plans.

Why?

We want to have a better understanding about some of the difficulties young people in care face when trying to get through their education, how they overcome some of these, what sort of things make it harder for them and what types of things make it easier.

What will I have to do?

If you agree to take part in the research, we will then decide together the best place for the interview to take place (possibly over the telephone). I will be interested in finding out about your views and experiences.

All contact with me is confidential. Neither your name nor any details about you will be available to anyone other than me.

If you are happy to participate in this research or would like to be contacted by me to find out more about the research then please **DO NOT** respond to this letter. If you **would not** like to be contacted by me please return slip A to the address below.

Who is authorizing the research?

The research is authorized by the Institute of Education, as well as by the Virtual School and Leaving Care Service in the Borough.

Who to contact

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SLIP A

I **WOULD NOT** be happy to participate in the research project about the educational experiences of young people from a care background.

Name _____

Signature _____

Address _____

Telephone number _____

If you change your mind and would like to participate in the research, please contact me using the details above.

Appendix III: Participant Consent Form

The educational experiences of looked after children: the views of young people in two London boroughs.

Before taking part in the research please can you fill in the consent form.

Please circle 'yes' or 'no'.

1. I have read the information sheet about the research and I understand what it is about.

    Yes   No

2. I understand that I can change my mind about taking part in the research at any time.

    Yes   No

3. I understand that the interview with be recorded.

    Yes   No

4. I give permission for these materials to be used in written articles and/or presentations as long as my identity is protected.

    Yes   No

5. I agree to take part in the research.

    Yes   No

Signed:

Print name:

Date:

Appendix IV: Example of interview transcript

Ray interview

Interviewer: So the first thing I'm just going to ask you about is just general background so…you're a male?

Respondent: Hmm

Interviewer: And your date of birth you told me is the X/X/X, so how old are you now? Sixteen?

Respondent: Fifteen.

Interviewer: You're fifteen…ethnicity?

Respondent: A quarter…sorry, mixed race.

Interviewer: Mixed race ok. Can you describe what you're mainly doing at the moment with regards to your education and any employment?

Respondent: I'm at a school, that's about it.

Interviewer: Are you in school every day?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: And do you have any part time jobs or anything like that you're doing?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: So just in school? So a bit boring! No, it's alright. Ok and…I know you probably…is it this year you do GCSEs?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: So you don't have any qualifications at the moment?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: But are you sitting some GCSEs this year?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: You are going to do some?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: Which ones are you doing this year?

Respondent: …English, maths, all the core ones and then art…

Interviewer: Are you good at art?

Respondent: Not really.

Interviewer: I bet you are.

Respondent: I did do BTEC sport but I dropped out because…

Interviewer: Too much

Respondent: Yeah, It was like three years work that I had to try and do in one year.

Interviewer: That's quite hard.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: I mean you could always do it later on I guess.

Respondent: I'm going to do a sports course for that, so I'll have more time, but just not while I'm in school.

Interviewer: That's a good idea because you're doing quite a lot actually. You're doing all the core ones and then you're doing art and if you had to do that you'd be taking on quite a lot.

Respondent: Yeah and then I'm doing performing arts.

Interviewer: Oh, are you?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Oh wow, do you have to specialise in something?

Respondent: No, you just learn the basics of how to do…

Interviewer: Drama

Respondent: Just like all the different paths…one subject I guess.

Interviewer: Is that something you want to go on and do or you just find it interesting?

Respondent: I find it interesting. I find it quite cool how it all works and stuff, so it's just like…

Interviewer: Oh wicked. And you're a singer and dancer as well…

Respondent: I do music like I make instrumentals up and rap kind of…

Interviewer: Oh wow, very talented!

Respondent: I've liked music for a long time, I get taught by my brother, so…

Interviewer: How old's your brother?

Respondent: Eighteen but I don't see him much.

Interviewer: Why? Does he not live with you?

Respondent: No, he lives not that far away but it's just…I'm lazy and I just don't go out…

Interviewer: And he's lazy and doesn't come down and see you much. Does he live on his own?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: Ok, what music are you into?

Respondent: …I would say but it's embarrassing.

Interviewer: Oh don't tell me like Celine Dion.

Respondent: I like classical music.

Interviewer: Oh do you? That's not embarrassing. I've studied music at university, so…

Respondent: I like listening to underground rap and stuff as well, but none of that mainstream stuff.

Interviewer: Oh very cool. Ok, so your current living arrangements, you're living with dad at the moment. So how long have you been living with dad?

Respondent: Since May I think.

Interviewer: Since May ok and how long…so you said in your current place you've been living since May and in the past few years…so how many…were you in foster care before or residential care?

Respondent: Foster

Interviewer: So how many foster placements were you in?

Respondent: Quite a few…I've moved quite a few times…like…eleven I think, I'm not sure.

Interviewer: Oh really? So quite a lot.

Respondent: I was with one for eight years so…

Interviewer: Oh I see, is that the first one you were with?

Respondent: No, I went to one…as we were going through it…two months and I went to another one, I was with them for two months again…I went to another one I was there for three years. And then eight years, then one year and just a little bit and then I came here.

Interviewer: Right I see, so what happened to the one that was for eight years, why did that one…

Respondent: Just…they weren't trained to do teenagers so I kind of like…I was a bit naughty so…

Interviewer: I'm sure you're not naughty.

Respondent: No, I am. I blame myself for moving really, but what happens happens.

Interviewer: But really it was…you feel that they weren't able to manage you because you were a bit older and…

Respondent: Yeah, they just like…it wasn't…they found it easier when people are going there a bit younger, but they…they only foster children and babies now because…that's what they like…because they've got a son of their own, so…but…

Interviewer: Was it hard to leave there?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: They'd become part of your family really.

Respondent: Yeah, at least it were a mum and dad so it was…it was hard but…I just thought what happens happens, you can't…get down over things that happen and…I'm with my dad now so…it's a good scenario.

Interviewer: It's a great scenario. So…you were telling me a little bit about you find some learning stuff in school hard, is there anything specific you find difficult?

Respondent: To be honest everything, I just…everything in school I find hard, but I try everything so it makes it a bit easier.

Interviewer: That's good, so you feel you're quite a motivated person that you try even if you find it a bit hard?

Respondent: In some things, some things I give up straight away.

Interviewer: So what things would you say you try harder at?

Respondent: I love English, I don't even think to do that…I got to do a…like maths I don't…like I'm good at maths but I can't sit in a maths lesson…

Interviewer: Because?

Respondent: The way it works, I just don't it. And I was like…they're teaching stuff there that I've already learnt so it annoys me going.

Interviewer: Oh, so it's almost a bit too easy, so you find it frustrating?

Respondent: Yeah, it's just like the basic things like timestable and…

Interviewer: And you know all that. Were you in a mainstream school before this school?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: So you were in…

Respondent: No, I went to a…I've been to a few schools.

Interviewer: Have you? How many schools have you been to?

Respondent: Mainstream, non-mainstream, non-mainstream, non-mainstream, mainstream…

Interviewer: So five schools?

Respondent: No, then non-mainstream, then here…

Interviewer: Oh my god, so loads! Is that because when you moved placement you had to move school?

Respondent: No, just…I got kicked out of a mainstream and then I went to a non-mainstream and then they sent me to another non-mainstream and…that's when I moved and I got put in a non-mainstream and…but I dunno what happened there, I think I…dunno…

Interviewer: It didn't work out.

Respondent: I stopped going because I just couldn't…things were just happening and they're just…

Interviewer: Happening at home and stuff, it's just too much.

Respondent: Yeah and I went to a mainstream and I just can't do mainstream, but this was a long time ago like…personally, I think I've grown up a lot since…I started thinking differently, I used to think 'f' everything 'cause I don't need it, whereas now

I'll go high school but they won't let me go back to mainstream so it's just like I've got to do the best I can with what I have.

Interviewer: What do you think made it change, that made your thinking change? Was it because you got older or…because now you're with your dad?

Respondent: I don't think it's really either, it's more…I saw what I was doing was stupid and…I just saw…

Interviewer: It just hit you one day, it wasn't like who changed your thinking…

Respondent: It's just keep on keep moving and stuff, I just realised it's my fault this has happened, it's the way I behave and the way I act with it.

Interviewer: Very mature. Ok, so any medical illnesses or physical difficulties or anything?

Respondent: Mm

Interviewer: Ok, so this is your last year at school, what are your plans next year?

Respondent: Get into music and get into sport.

Interviewer: Has anyone been helping you try and decide what your plans are for next year? Like you're going to do music and sport, you going to do it in a college? Or…

Respondent: I'm going to do sport, sport science and I'll do my music…so I'm going to keep doing that.

Interviewer: So someone's told you where you can do your sports then?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: So you know exactly where to go and…so who's advised you on what to do?

Respondent: A Connexions worker, but it's not a…with sports science you have to have trials so if I don't get through the trials I don't know what I'll do, but I'll probably just find another sports college.

Interviewer: So is this part of your BTEC or is it something different?

Respondent: No, it's something different.

Interviewer: Right, so it's the sports science is like a…what type of thing? Is it like a training course?

Respondent: Yeah, it's like training, you learn the science side of sport and you learn

football as well, so it's like football…it's like a football course with science in it. It's just like…I don't know what it is really, it's just like…training.

Interviewer: So you have to pass a certain number of tests basically?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: And if you don't pass them you're going to have to be thinking about what you're going to do?

Respondent: It's more of a…it's more like a football trial and then if you get through that then you have the other part as well.

Interviewer: Are you good?

Respondent: Getting better.

Interviewer: Do you practice every day?

Respondent: Yeah, I play…just train, yeah…I look…'cause my brother is like…a lot of things I do is because of my brother really but…

Interviewer: Has he been like a role model to you?

Respondent: Yeah, all my life, he used to tell me if I like…what food I was eating…but…

Interviewer: Was he with you in care?

Respondent: Yeah, but he…this is another thing, he moved as a teenager, out of the place I was in eight years because they kicked him out when he became a teenager so it was like…

Interviewer: Oh I see, so you…you were like together the whole time and then…

Respondent: But I had a choice to move with him and I said no because I was just fed up of moving like all the time, but like I still got to see him a lot.

Interviewer: So when he moved was it somewhere that was close to where you were?

Respondent: Yeah, at that time, yeah.

Interviewer: Ok. And then have you not been together at all since that time when you split?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: That must be hard.

Respondent: Yeah, but…when I'm older…

Interviewer: As long as you two aren't lazy you'll still see each other. Ok. So a little bit about your care history, so this is before you came into care, so just growing up, just tell me a little bit about…I mean you've told me how long you've been in care for, so you've said it's about…

Respondent: Since I was one.

Interviewer: Oh, since you were one? Wow, ok. So…number of moves, we said it was about seven or eight?

Respondent: Quite a few…every…

Interviewer: And…during those moves did you feel settled? Did you feel…

Respondent: Not really. I don't really remember my childhood if I'm honest, like I…I remember parts of it but… *I choose not to remember it.*

Interviewer: What parts do you remember?

Respondent: Usually moving and…

Interviewer: Would it be like in the middle of the night you were moving or was it like they'd warn you or they didn't warn you?

Respondent: It changed really, when I moved from when I was three years, it was just like, they just told 'you need to get in the car now,' it was just like…I don't know what was going on but when I moved from the eight years it was like all… and like had time to like… *just like think.*

Interviewer: …process it

Respondent: Yeah, just like think

Interviewer: Did your foster parents tell you or did the social workers tell you?

Respondent: My dad told me.

Interviewer: Your dad told you, have you been in contact with your dad the whole time?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: That's amazing.

Respondent: This is like weird, he told me on my birthday and it was like…I remember that day. Like I remember certain days in my childhood but I don't remember parts of it which is really

Interviewer: Because you think you've blocked it out because you weren't happy?

Respondent: I choose not to remember it.

Interviewer: So tell me about your contact then with your dad, so you've been in contact with him since you were born?

Respondent: Well, he had to wait…he had to do loads of stuff to see me so I didn't end up seeing him or mum until I was five, so it was just like…but since that point…

Interviewer: Were your mum and dad together then? So when you were born your mum and dad weren't together?

Respondent: No, it was when I got put in care that they had split up.

Interviewer: So you were living all of you together, then when you got put in care your parents split up?

Respondent: No…I'd rather not say really 'cause it's just like…

Interviewer: Ok, fine no worries. But do you still see your mum now?

Respondent: No, she's passed away.

Interviewer: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

Respondent: But it's a lot to do with my little brother but he's passed away as well.

Interviewer: How long ago did your brother pass away?

Respondent: When I was two, so when I was like…it was when my mum…when they split up I went into care and then…she had a baby with a different man…and I think I was like two and a half and…

Interviewer: And then he passed away?

Respondent: Yeah, but it wasn't…it doesn't affect me but…it's not…it's weird, like basically he didn't just like pass away really, he was…I don't know, I don't want to say the word but there's no other word to say it, he was…let's just say taken like…someone did something to harm him and…but it was like someone in my family so…

Interviewer: Very upsetting. I can see it still upsets you now quite a lot.

Respondent: I don't remember his face, I don't remember my mum's so…like my mum was…this may sound wrong but I love her but she was the wrong person and in the end in my mind she deserved what came to her because she like…basically she was part of what happened to my little brother but…

Interviewer: Did you see your mum before she died? Or were you not in contact with her?

Respondent: I refused to see her, but I saw her like six months before it happened 'cause she went to a…I wasn't allowed to see her, she was in one of them like loopy homes, I don't really want to say the word but like…her switch had gone, she just wasn't there any more so I wasn't allowed to go and see her, she could have easily…got aggressive and tried doing something to me…like…god knows, she was just a danger so…

Interviewer: But your dad you were allowed to see?

Respondent: Yeah, he used to come and see me a lot.

Interviewer: So he came to see…so he'd come to the foster homes to come and see you?

Respondent: Yeah, but when I was like twelve he put his back out so I had to travel up to see him and ever since then I just got the train up.

Interviewer: Oh you got the train up so you really made an effort to go see him?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: That's fantastic.

Respondent: Family to me are the most important thing…without family someone isn't anything, that's what I feel sorry for people that don't have family, but I don't have much of a family but…

Interviewer: But you've got your brother and you've got your dad and your dad's here now.

Respondent: I appreciate what I've got, yes, I know there's people out there much worse.

Interviewer: You're right, but it's all about your life today, yes you can compare yourselves to other people and you can say 'oh this one's got it better or this one's got it worse' but it doesn't mean that it's any easier for you, you've still obviously had a tough time. Ok. So…you've been with your dad since May but the Local Authority are still involved, they're still…

Respondent: Well, they say they are but they never come up, we don't get interrupted by them.

Interviewer: They don't ever come see you?

Respondent: It's just me and my dad now.

Interviewer: Do you not ever speak to a social worker?

Respondent: No, I still speak to my social worker but mainly on the phone or like if someone else comes to see me or something but I still talk to them and talk about it and stuff, but they leave me and my dad to be independently.

Interviewer: So they just…they're more there if you need them?

Respondent: Hmm.

Interviewer: And do they still give you advice in terms of schooling and things like that?

Respondent: Yeah, like they still have to like do meetings and stuff like that but…

Interviewer: But it's not as involved as it used to be?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: Ok, so how often would you say you talked to your social worker?

Respondent: It doesn't really have a time, it's just like whenever I…

Interviewer: Do they call you though?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: Alright. So let's just talk about your education experience in school now, so can you just tell me in general about what school was like for you, so how…well, we talked about the number of schools you went to, which was about ten, is that right? Or is it a bit less?

Respondent: I think it was like nine…eight…

Interviewer: Eight or nine, ok. So you went to a mainstream school first, that was your primary school and then was it in the middle of primary school that you got kicked out of mainstream school? Or was it once you got to secondary school?

Respondent: No, I left primary school at like Year 4 I think 'til Year 6.

Interviewer: So you were out of school for two years?

Respondent: One and a half

Interviewer: One and a half, so why were you out of school?

Respondent: Because I just wouldn't go to school.

Interviewer: You just bunked off because you just didn't like school?

Respondent: It wasn't…it was more…I couldn't think, my mind wouldn't let me think so I just couldn't go to school.

Interviewer: And did no-one try and get you back into school?

Respondent: Yeah, people always tried, but it's like…they couldn't do anything to get me back into school once I got to school I'd go back out of school, I would just sit somewhere and they would just sort of be like he's not going to do anything he may as well stay at home.

Interviewer: And did anyone come to the house to teach you?

Respondent: Yeah, I did have like teachers and that like…I wasn't just sitting there mindlessly.

Interviewer: That would have been nice, in front of the telly or playing computer games. But you had someone who came over and tutored you at home?

Respondent: Hmm

Interviewer: Was that because you felt just being at school everything was too much, you had so much going on at home and stuff and it was just a lot to think about?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you prefer being taught at home then?

Respondent: Yeah, definitely.

Interviewer: You didn't miss out…miss your friends or anything like that?

Respondent: Friends…like, I don't have them now, I didn't have them then, just…

Interviewer: Because you find it hard to make friends with people, you don't trust people or…

Respondent: More…I had friends but then I moved and I wouldn't want to be friends with anyone in this school to be honest.

Interviewer: In this school? Why? What about the two boys you went out with out of school just now?

Respondent: They're people I go to the shop with, like…I mean X is alright but I don't see him outside of school. I have one friend that I actually see out of school but the rest of them they're just…this is why I don't…this is one of the reasons I don't like this school, it's because…they're all just…they food fight and stuff, they throw apples at each other's faces, they fight everyday. I don't come to school to see this stuff. And also, they always try and wind me up, it's like I don't come to school to…I come to learn like, how am I going to learn if like…just a loud…like, there's boys here, they'll walk up to somebody just randomly and they'll just start fighting and that.

Interviewer: You're past it?

Respondent: Hmm

Interviewer: It's like what you said at the beginning, it's like you don't think that way anymore or you…

Respondent: I've never been a fighter, I've never been aggressive though, it's just the way that I act that gets me kicked out of schools, but…I mean I've never thrown a punch at someone in my life, like…but…I come here and see violence every day. I mean there's kids that whack me in the face every day, punch me in the side of the head.

Interviewer: And you never lose your temper? You're a better person than I am.

Respondent: If someone throws a punch at me I usually just…try and calm them down, I usually just…like the other day I got excluded because some kid, he was like…I did lose my temper a little bit but I never throw a punch, I never think to throw a punch, it just doesn't occur to me to start a fight.

Interviewer: So was it the language you were using which you got excluded for?

Respondent: Yeah and like throwing stuff. I mean I lose my temper, but I never…

Interviewer: You wouldn't hurt someone but you'd throw objects.

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: So this was a few days ago?

Respondent: Well, I hurt myself, I used to heat butt walls when I got angry, that was pretty stupid.

Interviewer: That's quite a boy thing though, I think a lot of boys do that.

Respondent: I've knocked myself out a few times by just whacking the wall.

Interviewer: Have you?

Respondent: Yeah, but…I've never like…

Interviewer: Do you punch the wall?

Respondent: No, never, I've never punched the wall.

Interviewer: So why your head? It's your face, don't ruin the face.

Respondent: It hurts more.

Interviewer: Does it? It's because you want it to hurt more?

Respondent: Yeah, I feel like if I get angry I head butt it, well I used to, this was…I don't do it anymore, I wouldn't be like 'oh I'll just head butt a wall.'

Interviewer: But you used to head butt the wall?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: Yeah, but why your head and not your hand?

Respondent: 'Cause I'm scared that I'll break my knuckles or…

Interviewer: But what about smashing your head?

Respondent: I got a hard forehead, nah, it's more…

Interviewer: Is it 'cause you want to feel the pain?

Respondent: A little bit, yeah, it's more just feel like…if I've done something wrong I head butt a wall because I'll be angry with myself, but…like, I don't punch, I don't even kick a wall, if I get angry I just walk and that's what I recommend to anyone that's angry, just walk.

Interviewer: I mean from what you say it's…you really sound like you've really grown up a lot and you've come along and the way you think it's like really commendable you know, I really praise you for it, but I mean what I wonder is…like what's changed? Why all of a sudden do you think so differently? All of a sudden something has switched and you just felt like I don't want to be that person anymore?

Respondent: It wasn't all of a sudden, like it's taken me a long time, like a long time. I don't know, I don't really know what happened, I just think I saw the bigger picture and like wow, I just like…I mean getting kicked out of somewhere where I've been for eight years, they told me I was just like and then I look back and think like 'shit, I've done this at this school, this at that school, behaved like this to this person, fallen out with that…' it's just…everything, I just thought about it, I was like…'why have I done it?' I never used to think about things that was my problem, just didn't think.

Interviewer: You were impulsive, you just did.

Respondent: I mean I'm still like it when it comes to arguments and stuff like that. I'll argue all the time.

Interviewer: With the kids at school? With teachers? Or with…

Respondent: More with my dad, I always argue. But it's the smallest of things like…who's making tea and stuff because I can just like escalate and argue and it's just…I keep talking back, I don't know when to shut up…it always end up in just a laugh

Interviewer: Well, that's good that you can laugh about it. So, we've talked, you've been to loads of different schools, you've had…how long…

Respondent: I still haven't answered that question

Interviewer: You haven't, so you went to about nine schools, you were in mainstream school, you were in Year 4 and then you left and you were home schooled for about a year and a half and then you went back to Year 6? Or you weren't in Year 6 at all?

Respondent: No, I went back to Year 6 for my SATS.

Interviewer: And you finished them?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: And then you went to secondary school?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: But not mainstream, you went to…another school?

Respondent: I did really well in my SATS. That's why I'm upset with myself now, I can't even write a sentence like…I used to have like really nice handwriting but…

Interviewer: So why do you think now you can't write? Because you don't have the confidence to do it?

Respondent: I never bother writing, yeah, I don't have the confidence to write neatly, I just think…I'm a scribbly writer…I mean…if I sit down like…if I'm writing a lyric I'll have to write it neatly but when it comes to writing on forms and stuff, I just…I'm like I can't do it.

Interviewer: But is that just because you care more about your music than you do about writing on a form for example?

Respondent: No, even if I write an exam, it'll just be scribbles, I'll say like they're not going to be able to read this, not even my teachers can read it. Some of them can but…

Interviewer: Would you want to change that?

Respondent: I tried, but…I'm getting better. When I first came to this school I couldn't even write like…well, I could write but you can't read what I'm writing.

Interviewer: Whereas now you can?

Respondent: Hmm.

Interviewer: Is there…I mean have they said to you whether you can use a computer or not to…do your GCSEs?

Respondent: I don't need to really. That's what I did have at one school.

Interviewer: But you don't want that? Because then you wouldn't have to worry about the writing.

Respondent: I don't want to.

Interviewer: You don't want to.

Respondent: That's what I love about writing, maybe if I didn't do it I would do it on there, but I love writing and so I like doing it with my own hands.

Interviewer: Do you think you'd want to practice? You could always practice at home.

Respondent: I do practice at home. I've got the spelling…

Interviewer: That's good, that's really good though

Respondent: It makes me seem like I'm in Year 6 though.

Interviewer: No, but do you know what? Nobody needs to know about it and it's something you can do at home and it's not because you're not bright enough or you can't do it, it's because you've been out of practice and like you said, you just don't have the confidence.

Respondent: I look at some of my old books and they're really well written.

Interviewer: So you know you can do it, but you just haven't been doing it and maybe haven't been…

Respondent: I'm just not very good at spelling which is…it gives me quite a good like…it's like if I wanted…my English teacher wanted…like give me a word to spell and I'll just spell it and they're like wow, it's really cool.

Interviewer: But those are the things you've got to hold onto to know what you're good at and think 'you know what, I can do this.'

Respondent: I like English as well because I can show my English teacher my lyrics and they'll like tell me like what bits are spelt wrong and what bits I could improve and stuff.

Interviewer: That's good, so you use your music in…..?

Respondent: Yeah, to me, music is… not just saying a load of words. There are artists out there that just like…all this gangster stuff like…ooh, you wanna write story in a rap, you want to let people know…make it into an art, not just a repulsive bit of talking.

Interviewer: Would you ever go on to something like X Factor or…Britian's Got Talent?

Respondent: No, what's X Factor?

Interviewer: You don't know what X Factor is? Shut up, you're lying!

Respondent: I don't

Interviewer: Serious? It's like a talent contest, it's a music, singing contest…on TV.

Respondent: Oh, is that the one with Simon Cowell?

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Respondent: I've watched it like once I think.

Interviewer: It's on Saturday night. Ok, so that was…so then you went to another school and how long were you in that secondary school for?

Respondent: …I don't know if I can remember that…oh the one when I was in Year 7, I was there for three years, so…I was…

Interviewer: And is that whilst you were with this foster parent for eight years?

Respondent: I was still being naughty then.

Interviewer: In what way were you being naughty? What were you doing?

Respondent: Throwing stuff…

Interviewer: So losing your temper…

Respondent: …shouting, getting angry. I used to sit in school and smoke cigarretes, that was when I was like Year 9 I think. I've been smoking for a long time and I used to smoke because I was…. I was just stressed out, I don't smoke anymore. But then I got into it a bit and I just sort of…but yeah, it was just the little things like at first I was just being naughty, making a lot of noise, just…

Interviewer: Because you wanted people to pay you attention or…

Respondent: Yeah that and a bit of just…I just wanted to make people's days bad…I didn't mind what it was really, just the way I acted. Just got worse really, like…I started getting involved with the wrong people in school so I took wrong things, I took stupid things again and…I never really did anything that major there, actually I did one thing, but that was just stupid, it was protecting a friend, but someone put…I saw my friend do it, he had someone put a screwdriver to her, to…I don't know why he was doing it, some kid acting hard, I just ran up to him and cut his…I messed him up really, but…that was a stupid thing to do because I could have just got a teacher and just said 'look…' it was just like I saw my friend and just…acted like…

Interviewer: And were you excluded for that?

Respondent: Yeah, I was.

Interviewer: So was that in the school you were in in Year 7?

Respondent: Hmm

Interviewer: So how long were you there for?

Respondent: I wasn't excluded like permanently out…

Interviewer: Oh, just temporary excluded.

Respondent: …but I was being…that was the time I was being really naughty. They had on call, so it was like you get a green on call if you're really good and you get like a prize or something and you got a yellow if you were…

Interviewer: A bit naughty.

Respondent: Yeah and then the teacher, the head teacher would come and talk to you and be like 'right, you've got to settle down' and so then you get a red on call or you get a taker and you get sent home or something like that, or something happens. And I used to get red on call every day so it was just like…or a yellow on call every lesson until the end of the day and I'll get a red or something like that. I just…I don't know what it was to be honest, thinking about it I just think it would have…I never really thought about these things much, but…

Interviewer: Were you not happy in school? Did you feel like the work was too hard?

Respondent: I couldn't do it, I just couldn't do it.

Interviewer: Did you not feel there was teachers or somebody in the school who was like there for you? Somebody you could talk to?

Respondent: Not in that school, not in that school. In other schools yeah, but not in that school. 'Cause it was ninety-students to three teachers it was just…I can't even…I can only just work in a classroom with like five people in it, it's noise in classrooms that gets me. Even in this school, if there's noise in a classroom I'll just walk out because I can't do it, like…

Interviewer: Which is probably why you liked working from home when you were in primary school.

Respondent: That's why I like working on my own as well, that's why I'm on my own quite a lot because I can't deal with the noise of other people. Certain people are just so loud, it's just so like…I've never liked noise, apart from music. That's why I listen to classical music 'cause it's not loud and like aggressive, it's just like…it's calming.

Interviewer: So that's when you were in Year 7, how long were you there for?

Respondent: Year 9 I think…

Interviewer: And then you went to another school, did you move schools because you moved foster placement?

Respondent: No, that was a…I went to a non-mainstream…side of that school and then my mum died at this time so there was like…I was like twelve, so that was a hard time and then I got kicked out of there and when I moved…

Interviewer: So you mean when you moved from the eight year foster placement you also…

Respondent: Yeah, I moved and I was like…I was like…it was on my fourteenth birthday…I moved…no, I left that non-mainstream, I went to another non-mainstream…and…they moved me to another non-mainstream school and…I moved when I was fourteen…

Interviewer: From the eight year placement?

Respondent: Hmm, to one that…they said it was a foster home but to me it was a residential, there was like six kids in there. There was like a kids lounge, a quiet lounge, an adults lounge and just like loads of rooms, this isn't a home in any way…it's just like…it was a residential. 'Cause they said…they asked me…if I wanted to go to my dad's or to a residential and I said 'I'll go to my dad's' this was after I was there 'cause…like…they…I don't know, they said to me like…'cause my brother went to residential and they were like 'if you go to residential I don't think it'll do you anything better' and I thought 'no, it won't'. I never wanted to go to residential 'cause I saw what it did to my brother, so it was just like…

Interviewer: Was your brother not happy there?

Respondent: At first he was but…he was there, he had to stay in residential for three years…so he just…he was like fighting with kids that were coming in and like everyone just wanted everything, it was…pointless.

Interviewer: So you knew you didn't want to go to residential?

Respondent: But it was like a residential home there but apart from everyone was a bit more calm and everything was a bit more settled. But they didn't like me.

Interviewer: Who didn't like you? The one that was in between the eight years and your dad?

Respondent: Yeah, my foster parents they weren't very nice, they didn't like me.

Interviewer: The parents didn't like you?

Respondent: They used to call me stuff…I won't repeat it.

Interviewer: They used to call you horrible things?

Respondent: Yeah, they used to be like…you're a druggie; you'll never make it and stuff. I was like…

Interviewer: How did that make you feel?

Respondent: Bad but…I just laughed and walked away like…to me like I call people stuff, they call me stuff, it's like…you can say what you want but…it doesn't really affect me, it's just words isn't it? So I told people and they were like…

Interviewer: Who did you tell?

Respondent: Social services…that was like…I used to just laugh because most of the time I was on weed when I was doing it…when they said it, so I just laughed, but…they used to call me like 'oh, you're just some druggy' to me, weed isn't…I'm not a druggy anyway if you smoke weed, it's just like a residential thing, like anyone can try it and they don't get called a druggy or this or that. But…

Interviewer: So once you told social services is that when they took you out and said you can go to your dad's?

Respondent: No, they just said they were like…they probably don't mean it and stuff and I was like alright. There wasn't really much I could do, it's just like…which is why I thought I knew I would get out of there at some point. So I just stayed there.

Interviewer: So you changed schools when you went to that small sort of residential type place, you went to that school and again you moved schools to come here when you went to your dad?

Respondent: Mmm. I was at the school there, I went to a mainstream school there and I got kicked out of the mainstream one, went to a non-mainstream…

Interviewer: Kicked out of mainstream because of your behaviour?

Respondent: And I got sent to a non-mainstream there…and…I was there for a bit and I got…I moved up here, I've come to this school.

Interviewer: Because where your dad lives is too far away from the other school, is that right?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: So it would have been too much of a journey?

Respondent: Hmm.

Interviewer: So you said before, we were talking…

Respondent: …no, they didn't want me back there either, they kicked me out basically…

Interviewer: Because of your behaviour?

Respondent: No, this is like…some Year 10…no, I was Year 10 as well, some kid in my year, he came up to me one day, this was the day before I was moving and he…he kicked me, punched me and threw me to the ground and I was like…so I got him back when he was eating, I poured a jug of water over him and I got kicked out of the school and I was like…

Interviewer: Did anyone stop to listen to you about what happened?

Respondent: No, they were like…people saw it as well and I was just like…

Interviewer: You said before that in the school that you were at in Year 7 that you didn't feel that there that you could really talk to or there was no teacher that you…but you said in other schools there were, which…what…

Respondent: In my last school.

Interviewer: In your last school, the one that was non-mainstream?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: And in what way did you feel that you could talk to them?

Respondent: The teachers, they were young so like…I connected with them well and there was a TA in my lesson, I'm not sure how old she was, but we like…with all the tutor, there was only three people in the tutor, there was me, X and X, so like…it was easy to just like learn, there was only three people in a lesson, so it was like…it was easy to learn and we could talk about more stuff, there wasn't so many people and like I…if I got annoyed she would like walk me round and just…

Interviewer: …calm you down.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: So was she somebody you felt like…you were just having a hard time, things were bad…

Respondent: Yeah, I could talk to her.

Interviewer: And did you feel that they motivated you and encouraged you and wanted you to do well?

Respondent: Yeah. There was a lot of teachers in that school like even the head teacher I could just go and talk to her because there wasn't a lot of…students in that school and she was quite…

Interviewer: But they kicked you out did they?

Respondent: Yeah, but…they knew I was moving anyway, so…

Interviewer: Right

Respondent: It was probably partly to do with…I wouldn't have gone back there anyway. That was in X basically so…

Interviewer: Too far away, ok. Alright. Ok…so we're talking about…we've probably addressed a lot of these questions anyway, but one of the things we're going to talk about now is your school experience once you've come into care…so…how…oh no, hang on one second…so actually you didn't go to school at all before you came into care, you've always been in care…the whole time…

Respondent: Yeah, I've always been.

Interviewer: Ok, so I won't ask you any of those questions. So just really thinking about your school experience once you're in care…do you think you were motivated at school in any way…and if you weren't motivated, why weren't you motivated?

Respondent: I wasn't motivated because… I didn't motivate myself.

Interviewer: Why didn't you motivate yourself?

Respondent: I don't know, I didn't have the mindset to think 'yeah, I'm going to do this.' I just thought 'nah, I'm not going to do it.'

Interviewer: Is it because you felt that you had too much else on your mind? Or…

Respondent: …just didn't think like…I had other stuff to think about.

Interviewer: And that school, the last school you were at where you felt actually you connected with some of the teachers, did you feel then more motivated to work?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: You did?

Respondent: I mean I've always liked certain lessons, like in my old school it was music, I don't do music here, but my old school I liked going to music and English, I could do them really well and science, whereas now I only do English 'cause it was like different ways that I learned, different ways that I'd do better at it.

Interviewer: Right, so were you more motivated in subjects that you thought you were better at?

Respondent: Yeah, that's why…I never used to be that good at football but…sorry. I had a…sorry…my brother has always been really good at football since I can remember so he taught me how to play and then…I just…I really like it now. I

couldn't even sit down and watch ten minutes of a football game, whereas now I'm proper like into football like 'yeah, come on!'… *a lot of things i do is because of my brother really.*

Interviewer: And is that you think really because your brother motivated you?

Respondent: Yeah and now I live with my dad there's a lot of football on.

Interviewer: Does your dad like football?

Respondent: Yeah, he likes football.

Interviewer: So really what you're saying is you became more motivated and interested in certain things when somebody like your brother or your dad…or a particular teacher really encouraged you to do it?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: Ok, that's very interesting. And what about friends? You said friends…because you didn't really have solid friends, is that because you moved schools quite a lot?

Respondent: Nah, a lot of people…there's a lot of people who are untrustworthy I guess.

Interviewer: You just didn't trust anyone?

Respondent: I've become friends with the wrong people…

Interviewer: The wrong people as in you mean people in the bad crowd, someone who…

Respondent: Not…not naughty or anything but they just…it's hard to explain…say like they said 'do you want to come somewhere with me?' And someone else said 'let me come with you I've got more money' or something and they were like 'yeah

Interviewer: So not nice people, people who would use other people for their money rather than just be friends with you because you're a genuine person.

Respondent: Yeah, it's like…even if…I still have money but they'll go for the person with more, that's what I don't like.

Interviewer: So it wasn't real friendship.

Respondent: Yeah, it was all just like…you want someone for some things…

Interviewer: So you felt you were just kind of…you didn't trust people. Ok, what do you think your expectations of yourself were and what do you think other people expected of you?

Respondent: I thought I didn't have to do anything, I just thought I'm not good at anything and…and I guess I think they thought the same to be honest, well that's what I thought anyway, so…

Interviewer: Why did you think that about yourself?

Respondent: …didn't have any confidence, still don't really, all I like to do is…well, I do everything on my own so I don't have to prove anything to anyone or…I don't have to be confident because I can be confident around some…but I find that if I do something in front of someone I just can't do it.

Interviewer: You're worried…do you think you ever felt, or do you think now you feel a bit more confident in certain things because you think they have confidence in you?

Respondent: Yeah, definitely

Interviewer: So give an example.

Respondent: English, like I go there and I try because I feel they think I can do it, they help me through it and I think I can do it, so it…like…they actually help me with it and…whereas I can't go science 'cause I've never liked and I've never been good at science so…in my old school I went to it because I used to do it on my own, so it was like…'cause I knew me in the class…

Interviewer: So no one was judging you, no one was watching you.

Respondent: It was just me just doing it but like science here there's other people in there and it's always so loud and to me it seems dangerous because they're like…sorry…I'm too tired to even speak, I feel stupid.

Interviewer: You are not stupid, everything you're saying is very interesting…

Respondent: Really?

Interviewer: Yeah, it is really interesting, please don't stop it's really interesting.

Respondent: No, it's not.

Interviewer: it is, honest.

Respondent: Yeah, I just can't do science because the people in there are just like…it doesn't seem safe, it doesn't seem right, it's weird.

Interviewer: Is that how you feel about maths as well because you were saying with maths that…

Respondent: Maths just…it seems a bit easy to me to be honest, it just seems like…why should I do stuff I've already done…

Interviewer: Have you asked the teacher for harder work?

Respondent: Yeah, I do a separate lesson of maths but it's different, it's like exam maths, so practice like all the exams and stuff like that, do like old exam papers.

Interviewer: And can you do that sort of stuff?

Respondent: Yeah. It's just me sitting there focusing on it

Interviewer: And is there someone in there with you?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Do they help you with the questions?
.
Respondent: They kind of give me help on certain parts like if I say…what does this mean? And then they'll say and I'll figure it out.

Interviewer: So it's almost like under test conditions, so they can't really…I know what you mean.

Respondent: It's more…yeah, it's kind of like that but they can still talk to you and help you if you are stuck, it's not like you're actually sitting a text because they will tell you what it means and stuff so you know it for when the test comes.

Interviewer: Ok, just a quick question, just going back, you know those eight years when you were in the foster placement…was it during that time that your mum passed away?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: Do you think it helped that you were with that family when that happened?

Respondent: Not really

Interviewer: Why?

Respondent: I think they had…they had a son and that hurt because I knew that I couldn't have my own little brother to like…be a big brother to so it hurt seeing…like I could treat him like my little brother but it just wasn't the same. And then that was hard when I moved as well because it was like I lost another brother, but…it was like…I can't even remember what you asked me.

Interviewer: No, I was just wondering, I was curious if…you being in that placement…

Respondent: …helped, yeah.

Interviewer: I wondered were you more stable in terms of your schooling at the time?

Respondent: I wasn't stable there….but that was just a time, it didn't matter where I was

Interviewer: It was because of the situation that was going on and things like that?

Respondent: Yeah. It's like that's when I started smoking weed…

Interviewer: That's as a result you mean when your mum passed away?

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: You had a lot going on so wherever you'd been it wouldn't have made a difference in terms of…because I was just curious if there was anything that could…made you more stable in school but actually you had a lot going on.

Respondent: There was like a court case about my mum's death as well, so…

Interviewer: Did you have to go to that?

Respondent: I had to…I had to write stuff about it, I had to answer questions and lots of stuff, it went on for like two years.

Interviewer: So it's not surprising that you were a bit all over the place at school.

Respondent: We had to sue for something that happened, it was like…it was meant to be a safe place and my mum was enabled to…should I really say this on…

Interviewer: No-one's gonna hear it other than me.

Respondent: Well my mum killed herself when she was in the ward and they were meant to keep her safe so she couldn't do anything like that, so we sued them for improper health and safety and they got fined and we got money for it, but it's not like…money doesn't represent like…

Interviewer: Money doesn't make anything better. Yeah, no I understand. Ok, so just going back again to school…can you think of anything specific that helped you as far as your schooling was concerned in terms of getting on and doing work or…

Respondent: People to talk to…actually, no…I'm not…I don't really talk to people about things so…

Interviewer: But in that last school you did.

Respondent: …people to listen. And people to…I like it like…not many people do but if someone understands me, if someone understands me…at my old school there was someone in a similar position, so we helped each other through it.

Interviewer: So it's also having a friend as well as having like a teacher to…

Respondent: Having someone I could actually proper trust…

Interviewer: Are you still in touch with that guy?

Respondent: Yeah, I've been friends with him for…I known him for a long time, I've been friends with him for…twelve years, since I was two years old. We went to a nursery together and stuff like that. I hadn't seen him for like three years and then I went to his school.

Interviewer: Oh so it was random that you happened to go to his school?

Respondent: Yeah, we still talked on Facebook and that…I told him I was coming, and I was like 'I'm coming to your school' he was like 'what?' I was like 'I'm coming to your school.' It's weird; we hadn't seen each other, so it was weird seeing each other both grown up, so it was like whoa!

Interviewer: So are you still in touch with him now?

Respondent: Yeah, he's coming to see me tomorrow.

Interviewer: Is he?

Respondent: but I haven't seen him in a while.

Interviewer: So he's someone you feel you can trust and you can rely on and…and that's helped.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: That's cool.

Respondent: He's always someone to talk to and he's seen me through my bad times and my good times, so he kind of understands what I've been through.

Interviewer: That's wicked. That's nice because you hadn't mentioned him before and he's obviously a really…like a good friend. Ok. So when things didn't go so well, so when you were having a really hard time, can you think of anything specific that made it harder for you and stopped you doing well? So apart from what you've talked about, do you think anything didn't help in terms of your learning?

Respondent: People having a go at me, people telling me I'm doing this wrong and that. Like if this…if the teacher was here, like if I say…like they won't keep going on at me if I don't go to lessons, they'll be like 'you've got art' and just leave it at that 'cause if someone says to me 'you've got art' I'm most likely to wait round for five minutes and then go to art, but if you keep standing there going 'you've got art, you've got art…'

Interviewer: It's like 'leave me alone'

Respondent: Yeah, it's like…I wander off to art whenever I feel like going and that's like…

Interviewer: So it's almost like giving you the space and then you'll go.

Respondent: That's why if I get annoyed they let me out and I just walk…I like my own personal space, that's why I always bring headphones everywhere I go, like it's…

Interviewer: So you needed space to calm down and then you would go.

Respondent: So that's what most people need really is like just a little space to let yourself calm down.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you thought actually…wasn't helpful?

Respondent: …a lot of things like…I think what wasn't helpful was…I can't be on one thing…like everything wasn't help…I don't know what…the way that lessons were taught didn't help me anyway but they…but no-one helping me wasn't helpful.

Interviewer: Yeah, not having somebody around so you that you could talk to them and say 'oh I'm finding this hard, can you help me?'

Respondent: Yeah, 'cause there was so many people…like they were sort of talking to someone and I always sit there for like twenty minutes and wait to talk to someone and I'd just get annoyed… just walk off. It was like…that's why I go into a small classroom because you can actually put your hand up and then someone will be there to like help you whereas like…

Interviewer: In big classes you can't do that. Ok. So I think you've pretty much answered this but looking back are there any particular people that you think made a difference? So in terms of you going to school and…so you talked about people who really made a difference so it was the teacher in your last school, your friend, anybody else you can think of who really made a difference?

Respondent: My dad…

Interviewer: The whole way through school you think made a difference?

Respondent: No 'cause he wasn't there at school…I think now since I've moved to his, he's helped me to see things clearer…like…I don't know, I think I've helped myself and I've made things worse for myself. I've had to rely on myself quite a lot.

Interviewer: What about any social workers or anyone like that do you think?

Respondent: I don't like the social service.

Interviewer: Why not?

Respondent: They interfere with too much, they don't let you have any freedom, it's like…and my dad have had quite a lot of freedom, but I don't need that because I don't have the friends that I did at…I used to go in and like…I had to used to be in at like six o'clock to eat and I'll go out for an hour, it's like I'm grown up I want a bit of freedom. I went missing for quite a while as well because I used to go out at seven in the morning and come back at one in the morning.

Interviewer: So you didn't go to school? You just bunked school?

Respondent: It was more weekends or holidays that I was just…or even at school nights I would just come in really late and then they just got really angry…'cause I was like, not angry in a way, just more frustrated with me not listening, but…

Interviewer: So who was it that was getting angry? Social services or your foster parents?

Respondent: Foster parents were getting like frustrated with me, just like…I used to wake them up at like three in the morning, just like…sometimes they wouldn't wake up 'cause I wouldn't…'cause like it was three storeys and they were at the top, so if I went late I would just have to like sit outside until they woke up.

Interviewer: You'd sit outside the door?

Respondent: Or just sit in the garden, just chill, wait for them…but it was like you can't really wake someone up by banging on the door if they're three storeys up fast asleep. It was more my…it was always my fault for going in that late though, but they woke up early anyway, so I didn't wait long.

Interviewer: Ok, we're almost coming to the end, I feel bad I've kept you talking for ages.

Respondent: It gets me out of lessons, out of maths as well.

Interviewer: Ok, so you are almost about to leave school…so…how do you feel about moving school? Do you have any financial worries? Do you have any concerns about…are you going to stay living at your dad's house?

Respondent: For a while. I'm going to move with him but I think I'll just…London, I just don't like it, I want to move somewhere far away.

Interviewer: Is your dad going to move?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: So you're going to just move wherever he goes, you'll go with him? And what about your older brother?

Respondent: We're going to all move and probably just like…probably not live together but just like get places…

[interruption to interview]

Interviewer: And in terms of social services, will they still be involved with you after you finish school?

Respondent: Probably not.

Interviewer: You think they'll finish by then, ok. So in terms of moving on has anyone offered you anything? Are social services saying to you 'ok, well you're entitled to this. You're entitled to that.'

Respondent: No, I know what I can get but I have to go down the same path my brother took, I'm not doing that.

Interviewer: What are you entitled to? What can you get?

Respondent: Well supported lodgings when you're sixteen and then…he's in a hostel until he can get a flat or…

Interviewer: Who is?

Respondent: My brother, I don't want to end up in a hostel so I'd rather just save money, buy myself a place. I mean I already have quite a lot of money, I've saved from the whole court. I used to save…I saved my pocket money for like eight years when I was at Lisa and Paul, I didn't spend money, but…

Interviewer: So you're entitled to housing? Have they offered you any financial benefits if you stay in school or anything like that?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: Ok and in terms of preparing you for now, going into adult life, do you think anyone here has been…anyone who's guided you in terms of anything?

Respondent: A lot of people are helping me at the moment.

Interviewer: A lof people?

Respondent: Well some people

Interviewer: Who's helping you at the moment?

Respondent: There's people trying to help me of what I want to do, like my music, there's people helping me record…stuff like that.

Interviewer: Who's this guy that's coming in to see you this afternoon?

Respondent: I don't know

Interviewer: You don't know who he is? He's someone who's helping you with your music?

Respondent: I think…..

Interviewer: Ok.

Respondent: I'm gonna ask…

Interviewer: So there's lots of people really trying to help you with your music and with your sports science and all that stuff?

Respondent: Not so much the sports, but…

Interviewer: more the music, ok. And do you think your education experience has made you feel any different to how you feel about leaving school and sort of moving on?

Respondent: Not really.

Interviewer: Do you think it's made you want to go into music more? Do you think you feel that…do you think you would have always done music?

Respondent: I don't know what I would have done, I still don't know what I'm going to do, music is just what I'm going to do…

Interviewer: At the moment?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: Ok. In terms of continuing with education, you're going to go on and hopefully, if you get in, do this sports science and if that works out, what does that involve?

Respondent: Football, playing for a team, training…doing the science surrounding like…doing a lot of written work, like BTEC and football at the same time.

Interviewer: But if that doesn't work out, do you think you'll stay in education? Do you think you'll do something else?

Respondent: I'll probably go to college, probably go to a music college or…just go to any sort of college that have decent GCSEs I can get into.

Interviewer: Alright, so you want to do something with your education at least? Is that you think now because your attitude's changed so you feel more focused and determined?

Respondent: Yeah. I know I need to learn more before I can do a trade or anything like…especially music. I can do the producing and stuff but it'd be good to learn how to like engineer music and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Sounds very technical. Ok. Do you think you can sort of see any problems in terms of any difficulties that you might have if you want to carry on with your education say…in terms of finance or anything like that?

Respondent: Being in a big place like college.

Interviewer: Because that was one of the things you said you find difficult, being with lots of people, being noisy…

Respondent: I don't mind the training…I'm active like I can go to…I can play football in big teams and that, I don't mind their noise but…

Interviewer: When you're focusing and they're…

Respondent: When you're trying to learn something and there's just someone shouting in your ear and stuff, you want to focus onto this but I can't. It's like reading a book and then someone's just like…blasting rock music next door it's…

Interviewer: No I get that, I totally get that. Ok. Just in terms of your opinion, can you give some suggestions how things could be improved for educating children who are in care. What do you think could make a difference?

Respondent: Get to know the kids better, listen to the kids as well, listen to the input…let them know there's someone there and they will listen to you, don't try to teach someone…that is having a hard time in a big classroom, listen to their point of view, that's what I would say…to help other people…people needing someone there for them I guess, whether it's a friend or a teacher, if you let them know you're there for them you can do wonders for them really.

Interviewer: I think that's a really valuable point.

Respondent: I hope so.

Interveiwer: I think it's very, very…and I have to tell you it's been so interesting talking to you today and I think you have said so many important things and…it sounds like you've had a really tough time but I'm so glad that you've obviously come through and are really doing something with your life. I really hope the music and sport works out and I…yeah, you've got great potential, you really do. You never know I might see you up, you know, on the TV one day rapping or something! I really do hope it goes well, so well done.

Appendix V: Designing the interview schedule

Rubin et al (2005) highlight the importance of the researcher being flexible and adaptable when carrying out interviews with young people. The value of being adaptable and prepared also extended to the way in which subject areas were covered and delivered. As young people were given the opportunity to speak freely and openly, this often resulted in the intentional introduction of a particular area, being pre-empted. For example, on occasion interviewees would start talking about a topic before it had been introduced in the interview schedule. Moreover, it was important to adjust or rephrase the wording of some of the questions, depending on the discourse adopted by the young people. Wengraf (2001) highlights the importance of asking questions in the 'style' of the participants. As a consequence, this also encourages rapport building with the young person.

A variety of questions were included in the interview schedule including some factual questions, such as, asking young people for their ages, length of time in care and their current arrangements with regards to housing, education and employment. As the interview progressed and the interviewees were more relaxed (this was assessed by the researcher and was based on the young person's body language and how comfortable they seemed to be when talking), the researcher then continued with more open ended questions that touched on more delicate issues (Taylor and Usher, 2001). These included questions about their care experience, educational experience and a number of questions relating to their motivation and attitude to learning; the expectations of themselves and others' expectations of them towards learning. Prompts and additional open ended questions were used, where necessary, to enable the young person to expand on the points being made. Given the sensitive nature of the research area, young people were advised that they need not discuss any topic areas or experiences, should they not wish to. Indeed it was also the responsibility of the researcher to stop asking additional questions about a particular topic, should it be uncomfortable or upsetting for the young person.

It was the hope of the researcher that participation in the study would be a positive experience for the young people. An incentive to take part in the study was that their views would be heard by representatives in the borough and they would be contributing to a project which had the potential to influence the lives of young people living in care in the Borough. In addition, a £20 voucher was given to each participant, following the interview, as a sign of appreciation for their time and expertise (Kumar, 1999).