

**APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABBREVIATION	DEFINITION
AI	Appreciative Inquiry
ASDAN	Awards Scheme Development and Accreditation Network - (activity based programmes)
CA	Content Analysis
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools, and Families
DECP	Department for Educational and Child Psychology
DFES	Department for Education and Skills
ECM	Every Child Matters
EP	Educational Psychologist
GCSE	The General Certificate of Secondary Education
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationary Office
ICD-10	International Classification of Diseases - Version 10
IPA	Interactional Process Analysis
KS2	Key Stage Two (Year 3 through to Year 6; pupils aged 7-11)
LA	Local Authority
LAC	Looked After Children
PEP	Personal Educational Plan
SDQ	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
TA	Teaching Assistant

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## **ABSTRACT**

Looked after children (LAC) have been identified as one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our education system (Sempik, Ward, & Darker, 2008); they are at risk of failing to achieve the *Every Child Matters* outcomes (DFES, 2004a), and, there are particular concerns regarding low levels of academic achievement (DCSF, 2009c). Much of the research regarding LAC is from a deficit perspective and attempts to justify the poor outcomes reported; only recently has attention been paid to identifying what works well in schools to promote achievement.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) proposed by Cooperrider & Srivastva (1987) is an affirmatively focused method of research and development which challenges traditional problem-solving approaches (Grant & Humphries, 2006); it seeks to discover the existing strengths and successes within an organisation to inspire change (Espinosa, Roebuck, & Rohe, 2002). Whilst the efficacy of AI has been demonstrated within organisational and healthcare settings there is a dearth of literature evidencing the efficacy of AI in educational settings. AI has not been used with LAC, or the professionals who work with them, and this approach has the potential to provide a new lens on this historically problematic area.

This thesis proposed to identify key factors which have the greatest positive impact on the school experience of LAC, in secondary schools, through the use of AI. In doing so, this thesis also sought to explore the efficacy of AI as a research tool for working with LAC and school staff, and, to explore its potential for creating change. A single case study design was used involving one local authority secondary school. Participants attended semi-structured interviews aligned with the AI 4-D cycle; this was followed by a workshop session to explore findings and agree future actions. Further data was also collated through content analysis of the research interviews, participant evaluations and a research diary.

Key themes were identified including: effective adult support, engaging learning opportunities, rewarding school systems, a safe and secure environment, good quality relationships, and the importance of normalising the school experience. A number of supplementary themes were also identified. AI was found to be an effective method of research; it appears to be an interactive and enabling approach, which considers both organisational successes and concerns. During the workshop a number of actions were identified to further improve the school experience and there is a high likelihood that change will occur. Implications for EP practice and areas for future research are also considered.

*Key terms: appreciative inquiry, looked after children, secondary school, educational psychology.*

## **DECLARATION**

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. THESIS RATIONALE**

Since embarking on my training as an Educational Psychologist (EP), I have been intrigued by the distinctive contribution EPs can make when working with vulnerable groups of children and young people. In particular my studies relating to childhood development, attachment theory, and family dynamics has led to a curiosity concerning the ways in which we can effectively support looked after children (LAC) and promote positive outcomes.

As I began to learn more about the LAC population it became apparent that much of the documentation and research emanates from a deficit perspective, where the challenges and ‘problems’ experienced by both LAC and the professionals working with them are seemingly becoming more and more entrenched. There is little celebration of success and achievement and only recently has attention been paid to the identification of what works well within schools in order to promote positive outcomes.

I then became aware of Appreciative Inquiry (AI), an affirmatively focused method of research and development, which challenges traditional problem-solving approaches through focusing on the identification of factors which contribute to the organisation working at its best. Whilst there is a growing body of literature detailing the efficacy of AI within organisational and health care settings, there are limited applications detailing the use of AI within the field of education. In particular, there are no published studies which detail the use of AI with LAC or the professionals who work with them. However, it is recognised that AI could potentially provide a new lens for historically problematic areas.

### **1.2. AIMS OF THE STUDY**

Within the local authority (LA) which hosts the researcher there are ongoing concerns regarding the academic achievements of LAC, which is a concern well-documented at a national level. Through ongoing discussions it was recognised there would be benefits of exploring how we can improve the

school experience for LAC, and in doing so, potentially improve academic outcomes.

This thesis was therefore designed to identify the key factors which have the greatest positive impact on the school experience of LAC, in secondary schools, through the use of AI. In doing so, this thesis also aimed to explore the efficacy of AI as a research tool for working with LAC and school staff, and, to explore the potential of AI for creating change within the school organisation.

### **1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Following a broad review of the literature pertaining to both LAC and AI, four research questions were proposed:

1. Through the use of appreciative inquiry, what factors are identified within the chosen secondary school, as having the greatest positive impact on the school experience of looked after children?
2. Is appreciative inquiry a valuable and effective research tool for working with looked after children?
3. Is appreciative inquiry a valuable and effective research tool for working with school staff?
4. How likely is AI to be effective, within the chosen secondary school, in creating change?

### **1.4. THESIS OVERVIEW**

An overview of the content of this thesis is presented in table 1.1 overleaf:



CHAPTER	CONTENT
<b>ONE</b>	<p><b>INTRODUCTION</b></p> <p>Provides an overview of the thesis, detailing the research rationale, the research aims, and the key research questions. It also provides an outline of the written thesis structure.</p>
<b>TWO</b>	<p><b>LITERATURE REVIEW - PART 1</b></p> <p>Provides a review of the literature regarding LAC and the Every Child Matters outcomes. The importance of obtaining the voice of the LAC is also considered, before attention is paid to the role of the EP in promoting positive outcomes for LAC.</p>
<b>THREE</b>	<p><b>LITERATURE REVIEW - PART 2</b></p> <p>AI is defined and an overview of AI methodology is presented. There is a broad review of the literature pertaining to the applications of AI including a systematic review of AI and education. The efficacy of AI and methodological critiques are also considered.</p>
<b>FOUR</b>	<p><b>METHODOLOGY</b></p> <p>Details the AI research design, participant sampling methods, data collection and analysis, and, ethical considerations. An overview of an AI pilot study is also reported.</p>
<b>FIVE</b>	<p><b>RESULTS</b></p> <p>Results from the data collection and analysis are presented in accordance with the four research questions.</p>
<b>SIX</b>	<p><b>DISCUSSION</b></p> <p>The key themes identified as having the greatest positive impact on the school experience of LAC are discussed, along with the efficacy of AI and the potential for creating change.</p>
<b>SEVEN</b>	<p><b>CONCLUSIONS</b></p> <p>Summarises the main research findings and provides a personal reflection on the culmination of this thesis.</p>

*Table 1.1. Thesis Overview*

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW - LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

This literature review provides an overview of information contained within academic texts and journals pertaining to the areas of looked after children and appreciative inquiry.

This review begins by defining the looked after children (LAC) population and the role we have as corporate parents in promoting positive outcomes in accordance with the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda. In doing so, the following areas are reviewed: emotional well-being and behaviour, the stability of care placements, educational outcomes and future prospects. The review will then consider the importance of obtaining the voice of the LAC to inform service development and reform. Attention will then be paid to the role of the Educational Psychologist (EP) in improving outcomes for LAC.

The following chapter will then explore appreciative inquiry (AI) methodology and how this affirmatively focused approach can potentially provide a new way of working with LAC and the school staff who work with them. This chapter will define the AI approach and will summarise examples of AI in practice across a variety of domains, with a particular focus on AI and education. The efficacy of AI will then be explored before considering the methodological critiques.

### **2.1. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

Within the education sector there are a diverse range of vulnerable pupils, including pupils with medical needs, Gypsy and Traveller pupils, asylum seekers, young carers, pupils with special educational needs (SEN), and children who are living in care (Kendall, Johnson, Martin, & Kinder, 2005). LAC in particular have been identified as one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups within our society (Sempik, Ward, & Darker, 2008).

The Children's Act (HMSO, 1989) specifies the local authority will accommodate a child, for one of the following reasons:

1. There is no one with parental responsibility for the child
2. The child has been lost or abandoned
3. The person caring for the child is prevented (whether or not permanently, and for whatever reason) from providing appropriate accommodation and care.

Children may be taken into care due to adverse experiences within the family environment, an insufficient parenting capacity, the illness or death of a parent, or, care may be provided for a child with disabilities / complex needs, a child seeking asylum, or, in accordance with a custodial sentence (Rocco-Briggs, 2008). However, research suggests the most common reason children enter the care system is the experience of abuse or neglect (DCSF, 2009b).

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF, 2009c) report as of September 2008 there were 43,700 children who have been looked after continuously for at least twelve months, of which 33,000 were of school age. As many as 90,000 children pass through the care system each year (DFES, 2004a). It is suggested that the number of children in care is decreasing, however, those children who do enter the care system tend to stay longer (Rowlands & Statham, 2009). Variations in prevalence rates across the country are evident and this is attributed to inconsistencies regarding entry and exit criteria (House Of Commons, 2009).

LAC are not a heterogeneous group and a holistic approach is required to understand the diverse needs of this group. LAC experience multi-dimensional disadvantage within the spheres of interpersonal relations, leisure and culture, citizenship and economic activity (Axford, 2008) and there is not one commonly defined area of need (Hare & Bullock, 2006).

Professionals working within central and local government, service providers, and carers, have a joint responsibility and accountability as corporate parents to ensure the well-being and high quality care of LAC (DFES, 2006a). The introduction of the *'Every Child Matters: Change for Children'* agenda (DFES, 2004a) provides a framework to promote positive outcomes for all children, to

maximise opportunity and minimise risk. This framework identifies five outcome areas: be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and achieve economic well-being. There is a professional duty to enable all children and young people to meet these outcomes, especially those children who are in care.

## **2.2. BE HEALTHY**

The DfES (2004a) specify criterion for the 'Be Healthy' outcome which makes explicit reference to mental and emotional health, physical health, sexual health and substance misuse. Children should be encouraged to lead healthy lifestyles and it is the responsibility of parents, carers, and families to promote healthy choices.

It is reported that LAC experience a range of challenges and adversity which can impact upon all areas of social and emotional development (Osborne, Norgate, & Traill, 2009). Children entering the care system are more likely to have experienced disadvantage and a number of social and environmental risk factors, such as parent mental illness, alcohol and drug misuse, and domestic violence (McAuley & Davis, 2009). Such pre-care factors predispose children to developmental, health, and mental health difficulties (DFES, 2004a).

It has been suggested as many as two-thirds of all LAC experience at least one physical ailment, from vision problems, to speech and language difficulties, to motor coordination difficulties (Meltzer, Lader, Corbin, Goodman, & Ford, 2003). Many children enter the care system with poor levels of health which is attributed to pre-care factors including poverty, poor parenting, chaotic lifestyles and abuse (Mooney, Statham, Monck, & Chambers, 2009). There are reports of LAC engaging in substance misuse, alcohol abuse, and smoking, particularly amongst those children in care who also experience emotional or conduct disorders (Meltzer, et al., 2003); LAC are also more likely to experience teenage pregnancy (Knight, Chase, & Aggleton, 2006).

### **2.2.1. EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING**

It is reported there is a high prevalence of mental health difficulties within the LAC population and there are insufficient evidence-based interventions available; this is an area of research which has received little attention until recently (McAuley & Davis, 2009; Stanley, Riordan, & Alaszewski, 2004). A range of difficulties have been identified including conduct disorder, overanxious disorder, major depressive disorder, and unspecified functional psychosis (McCann, James, Wilson, & Dunn, 1996). Many early studies also describe difficulties which could now be aligned with attachment disorder (Dimond & Misch, 2002). In more general terms, LAC have reported feeling 'down', depressed, lonely, rejected, stigmatised, low in self-esteem, and, unable to trust others (Knight, et al., 2006; McGinnity, 2007).

There are some discrepancies in the prevalence rates of mental health difficulties cited within the LAC population but nonetheless this provides an estimate. Meltzer et al., (2003) interviewed 1039 carers of LAC, aged 5-17, from 134 authorities. It was reported that 45% of children met ICD-10 (World Health Organisation, 1992) criteria for a mental disorder, 37% for clinically significant conduct disorders, 12% for emotional disorders, anxiety, or depression, and 7% were rated hyperactive.

In comparison, Stanley, et al., (2004) completed a pragmatic assessment of 80 case files, of children aged 5-16, in two local authorities. This study suggested that emotional and behavioural problems were more prevalent amongst LAC than within the general population; conduct problems were reported in 50.2% of children and emotional problems in 22.9%. Emotional and behavioural problems were also evident in 18.9% of cases involving children under the age of five and the authors argue the prevalence of emotional and behavioural difficulties is under-reported. These figures should however be interpreted with caution as no official diagnostic criterion was used within this study.

The mental health needs of LAC are not routinely assessed and help is most often sought when problems become entrenched, placements have broken

down, and more intensive support is required (Whyte & Campbell, 2008). It is suggested that there should be a coherent assessment of well-being at the point of entry into care and that identified needs should be met through highly intensive, skilled, adult support (Sempik, et al., 2008). The DCSF have requested that the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ, Goodman, 1997) is used to screen all LAC, between four and 16 years, who have been in care for one year, to promote early identification of difficulties and timely interventions. A pilot study by Whyte and Campbell (2008) demonstrated the use of the SDQ led to a 12% increase in care plans which targeted peer relationships, social skills, and activities to increase self-esteem. However, some professionals perceive this to be a 'burden' where good identification systems are already in place (Blower, Addo, Hodgson, Lamington, & Towlson, 2004).

There is a recognised shortage of therapeutic services for LAC and it is argued that the emotional support required at the stage children enter into the care system, such as counselling, therapy, advocacy, befriending, and mentoring, is insufficient (Knight, et al., 2006). It is advocated that access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) should be guaranteed for those who need it (House Of Commons, 2009). Some practitioners argue there is a need for a dedicated LAC mental health services (Whyte & Campbell, 2008) as generic CAMHS are perceived to be ineffective in meeting the needs of LAC and are often difficult to access as placement stability is a pre-requisite (Callaghan, Young, Pace, & Vostanis, 2004; Robson & Briant, 2009). It is also reported that many LAC are reluctant to engage with services and some LAC perceive mental health professionals as untrustworthy and irrelevant (Blower, et al., 2004).

Vostanis, Bassi, Meltzer, Ford, & Goodman (2008) identified that LAC's main contact in relation to mental health issues was most frequently their social worker or link worker (84% overall), followed by their teacher (59.3% overall), with health services involved if there was a comorbid hyperkinetic or emotional disorder. This suggests there is a need for an interdisciplinary awareness of mental health difficulties, particularly amongst social care and

education staff. Multi-professional services are being developed and evaluated, involving primary mental health workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists, in a response to this unmet need (Callaghan, et al., 2004; Kelly, Allan, Roscoe, & Herrick, 2003).

### **2.2.2. BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES**

As identified in the previous section (2.2.1) a range of behavioural difficulties have been reported within the LAC population (McCann, et al., 1996; Meltzer, et al., 2003; Stanley, et al., 2004). A number of predisposing factors have been identified which increase the likelihood of behavioural difficulties including parental conflict, family breakdown, inconsistent discipline, hostile and rejecting relationships, and the experience of abuse (Geddes, 2006). Behaviours exhibited can include self-harm, delinquent behaviour, aggressive behaviours and attachment difficulties (Rocco-Briggs, 2008). Children may present as flat in mood or withdrawn, they may show signs of anxiety, phobic behaviours, bed-wetting, soiling and smearing, stealing, lying, inappropriate sexual behaviour, physical and verbal aggression (Sempik, et al., 2008). LAC are also vulnerable to peer victimisation within the community, the care setting, and within schools. LAC are twice as likely to be bullied in primary school and four times as likely to be bullied in secondary school; they can also act as the perpetrator of bullying behaviours within the school environment (DCSF, 2009b, 2009e). Subsequently LAC are more likely to be permanently excluded from school (DCSF, 2008a).

Working with children who exhibit behaviour difficulties is challenging; adults and professionals experience a range of emotions including rejection, hurt, shock, insecurity, inadequacy, anger, and helplessness (Ironside, 2004; Rocco-Briggs, 2008). This is further compounded by reports that professionals lack the time, expertise, skills, and funding to work effectively with challenging LAC (Soan, 2006).

### **2.2.3. A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

It is argued that research in this area has lacked theoretical explanation and reports have been largely descriptive (Holland, 2009). It is proposed that

behaviours exhibited by the child, both verbal and non-verbal, are a reflection of early relationships and the emotional hurt experienced; behaviour is perceived to be an expression of the child's feelings, anxiety, and pain (Rocco-Briggs, 2008). However, there are two key psychological theories which have been particularly pertinent in offering explanations for this observed behaviour: attachment theory and theories of resilience. These are briefly summarised in the following sections.

### **2.2.3.i. ATTACHMENT THEORY**

Attachment theory has been advocated as one of the most important frameworks for understanding the risk and protective factors in child development (Slater, 2007). Attachment theory emphasises the importance of the early relationship between the child and their mother and where maternal deprivation occurs there are long-lasting implications for the child (Bowlby, 1988). For successful development to occur children need to feel safe, protected and nurtured (Ryan, 2006) and they need to experience a warm, intimate, continuous relationship with a primary caregiver (Geddes, 2006). Adults need to provide a safe and secure base from which the child can develop and explore the world (Bowlby, 1988).

Based upon the attachment relationship experienced, a number of 'attachment patterns' have been identified, ranging from secure attachments where the child experiences straightforward care and support, through to avoidant, ambivalent-resistant, or disorganised-disorientated attachments; in the latter the child appears frightened within relationships and is unable to organise their behaviour (Golding, 2008).

These early experiences lead to the development of 'internal working models' of the world and can have a long-lasting impact on development, behaviour and personality (Slater, 2007), on inter-personal relationships and the ability to relate to others (Sigelman & Rider, 2009; Rocco-Briggs, 2008). Consequently, if the child's attachment needs are not met this can lead to difficulties in social, behavioural, emotional, physical and physiological development; there are also long-term impacts on brain development and



there are strong links between abusive early relationships with the development of psychiatric problems including depression, anxiety, aggression or delinquency (Ryan, 2006; Teicher, 2002). At an early age these experiences can also impact upon the child's ability to function within the classroom; securely attached children are more likely to develop social competency, emotional literacy skills, and effective early play skills, whereas, children who are insecurely attached are thought to have less confidence, lower self-esteem, higher levels of negative affect and negative behaviour (Geddes, 2006).

### **2.2.3.ii. RESILIENCE THEORY**

Resiliency is a core construct in psychological well-being alongside autonomy, problem solving, and attentiveness skills (DCSF, 2008b). Whilst there is not one commonly accepted definition of resilience it is recognised that this refers to the individual's ability to adapt in the face of significant adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2007) or to withstand or recover from difficult conditions (McMurray, Connolly, Preston-Shoot, & Wigley, 2008). A resilient child is more able to cope effectively with stress and everyday challenges, 'to bounce back' from difficult or disappointing experiences, is more able to set realistic goals and problem solve, and to have good interpersonal skills (Goldstein & Brooks, 2005). Resiliency is a dynamic trait best conceptualised as a continuum; at one end is vulnerability and at the other end is resilience (Daniel & Wassall, 2002). The development of resilience is therefore paramount for children who are vulnerable or at-risk (Ttofa, 2006).

The literature pertaining to this area identifies a number of risk factors, which include poverty, racial discrimination, poor parenting, abuse and neglect, an unstable environment and limited opportunities (Richman & Rosenfeld, 2001). However there has been a strong focus on identifying protective factors to enhance resiliency. These include individual factors such as good cognitive ability and positive self concept; familial factors such as secure attachments and emotional warmth; and social environmental factors such as good peer relationships and positive role models (McMurray, et al., 2008). Community-based factors have also been identified such as good standards of living and

opportunities to engage in sport and leisure activities (DCSF, 2008b). A number of school based factors have also been identified including stability and continuity, learning to read and write fluently, having a parent / carer who values education, having friends outside care who achieve well, developing out of school interests, a significant adult who offers consistent support and encouragement, and regular attendance (Jackson & Martin, 1998). Promoting resiliency throughout childhood development can eliminate the risk of adulthood adversity and contributes to positive long term outcomes (Gilligan, 2002). In order to support the development of resilience it is important children have plentiful opportunities for participation and for developing emotional literacy skills (DCSF, 2008b). Children need to access caring, supportive, and secure environments, to actively engage in education, to develop friendships, talents and interests, positive values, and social competencies (Daniel and Wassell, 2002). This has been conceptualised as a resiliency wheel which highlights the importance of prosocial bonding, clear and consistent boundaries, life skills, care and support, high expectations, and meaningful opportunities for participation (Henderson & Milstein, 1996).

#### **2.2.4. SUMMARY OF BE HEALTHY**

LAC are one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups within the education system. It is recognised that LAC have experienced adverse standards of care and a range of social and environmental risk factors prior to entering the care system. Research also indicates LAC are vulnerable to a range of physical and emotional health difficulties and children can present with a range of challenging behaviours. These difficulties can be chronic and disabling despite early recognition, attempts at intervention, and supportive care (Blower, et al., 2004). Psychological theories of attachment and resilience offer further insight into these difficulties.

It is proposed that routine assessments of emotional health should take place at the point the child enters into the care system, and any identified needs should be met through intensive support by highly skilled adults, who are able to offer a range of evidence-based interventions. These difficulties experienced by the LAC can impact on all areas of functioning within school

and family settings, and can also impact upon communication skills and peer relationships (Robson & Briant, 2009). Those LAC who experience greater mental health difficulties are more likely to experience difficulties within education (Stanley, et al., 2004).

### **2.3. STAY SAFE**

The DfES (2004a) specify criterion for the 'Stay Safe' outcome which includes safety from maltreatment, neglect, violence, sexual exploitation, accidental injury, death, bullying and discrimination, crime and antisocial behaviour. Emphasis is placed on the need for security, stability, and to be cared for, with responsibility placed on parents, carers, and families to provide safe and stable home environments.

#### **2.3.1. STABILITY OF CARE PLACEMENTS**

Children in care, whether in residential settings or in foster placements, have the right to experience permanence; that is a stable placement, within a reliable family where they are included (Baker, 2007). This home environment should be safe, containing, and predictable (Ingley & Earley, 2008). It is reported that LAC respond best to continuous foster placements which provide a secure base through the provision of five core characteristics: availability, sensitivity, acceptance, cooperation and family membership (Ward, 2004). Many young people speak appreciatively of their care experiences and believed they were well cared for (Blower, et al., 2004).

The disruption of placements has been broadly categorised into three areas: 1) issues relating to the child's presentation and history i.e. within-child issues, 2) issues relating to the skills of the carer and levels of support required, and 3) the match between these two factors (Sinclair & Wilson, 2003). More specifically, placement breakdown has been attributed to a variety of behaviours including: challenging behaviour, aggression towards foster carers, conflicts with birth siblings in placements or with another foster child, conflicts with the carers' birth/grandchildren, allegations made against carers, and school based problems (Ingley & Earley, 2008).

Wilson, Sinclair, & Gibbs, (2000) acknowledge that whilst many carers experience satisfaction through fostering a small percentage reported fostering affected their sense of well-being, that they required greater support and information, remuneration, and support with practical arrangements such as meeting with birth parents. In particular, allegations by children, disagreements with social workers, difficult relationships with birthparents, and family tensions were found to impact the carer's mental health and ultimately their decision to continue fostering.

Difficulties are also evident within residential units including scandals of abuse, peer violence, the use of physical restraint, poor educational support, discrimination due to gender, disability and ethnicity, and there is a need for greater staff training (Kendrick, 2008); however staff report that through their practical experiences they are confident in their knowledge and skills (Hatfield, Harrington, & Mohamad, 1996). Children within residential units have also reported incidents of peer pressure and more frequent opportunities to engage in sexual relationships, with some young girls entering into exploitative, coercive, relationships (Knight, et al., 2006). The predominant focus on such difficulties has overshadowed the merits of high quality residential care and it is argued this provision should not be overlooked and should be used flexibly within care packages (House Of Commons, 2009; Kendrick, 2008).

It is also important to note that LAC have reported difficulties settling into new care placements due to the little preparation and the high expectations during the transition and adjustment phase (Knight, et al., 2006). The scarcity of care placements also creates an additional pressure, particularly for children with disabilities or learning impairments, and for children from black, Asian and black mixed parentage (Baker, 2007; Frazer & Selwyn, 2005; Selwyn, Frazer, & Quinton, 2006).

Recurrent upheavals can further impact the child's emotional attachments and the ability to form relationships that are secure and trusting (Knight, et al., 2006); this can also impact upon access to education (House Of Commons,

2009) as well as access to therapeutic services and treatment (Osborne, et al., 2009). The maintenance of stable care placements is a core factor in psychological recovery and well-being (Ingley & Earley, 2008) and if this is not achieved, this can increase vulnerability to problem development (Robson & Briant, 2009).

It is proposed that greater attention should be paid to identifying and removing barriers which obstruct the development of good personal relationships within the care system (House Of Commons, 2009). Attention also needs to be paid to supporting transitions between the home and care setting when the child enters or leaves care (Broadhurst & Pendleton, 2007), as it is during these transitions young children in particular may experience further loss and rejection (Osborne, et al., 2009).

It is also recognised that there needs to be greater support and training to enable the recruitment and retention of foster carers; such training can increase understanding, self confidence and self-efficacy (Golding, 2006; Whenan, Oxlad, & Lushington, 2009). In particular the importance of comprehensive training for those providing care for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties has been emphasised (Herbert & Wookey, 2007; Minnis & Devine, 2001). Effective training programmes have incorporated a vast range of subjects, for example, Robson and Briant (2009) provided a training programme which covered the following areas: introduction to local services, self-care techniques, anxiety and anger management, improving emotional literacy, attachment and attachment interventions, formulation and common core beliefs, dealing with disclosures and supporting survivors of abuse, mental health disorders, communication and transactional analysis, and behaviour management techniques. This particular programme was deemed effective by the participants and it demonstrates the broad range of skills required to enable carers to be effective in their role.

### **2.3.2. SUMMARY OF STAY SAFE**

The literature in this area identifies children are most successful when they experience continuous care placements which are secure and inclusive. In

reality placements often break down and this has been attributed to a range of individual, social, and systemic factors. These difficulties are seen across all types of care provision and recurrent upheavals can have an adverse impact on the child's development. Barriers to providing high quality care must be identified, there should be greater support at key transition points, and comprehensive training must be available for carers.

As proposed in Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1975) it is essential that our basic physiological needs are met, and that we feel safe and secure, before we are able to achieve any higher order skills such as developing positive self-esteem and achieving self-actualisation. As corporate parents we are responsible for providing environments where these basic needs are met in order to facilitate access to social and educational opportunities. This is explored in the following section.

## **2.4. ENJOY AND ACHIEVE**

The DfES (2004a) specify criterion for the 'Enjoy and Achieve' outcome which includes the child being ready for school, that they attend and enjoy, that they achieve stretching educational standards at primary and secondary school, that they achieve personal and social development and enjoy recreation.

### **2.4.1. EDUCATION**

Some LAC achieve well and report being cared for positively impacts their educational experiences (Harker, Dobel-Ober, Akhurst, Berridge, & Sinclair, 2004). However, the average attainments of LAC is lower than their peers; in 2008 14% achieved at least 5 A\*-C grade GCSE's compared with 65% of the general population. Previously this figure was 11% (DCSF, 2009c). These differences are also noted at key stage 2 (KS2) with LAC significantly less likely to reach level four in English or maths (DCSF, 2009b). LAC are more likely to have special educational needs (SEN) and 27% of the LAC population have statements of SEN compared to 3% of the general school population (DCSF, 2008a).

Historically, the educational experiences of LAC has received limited attention (Francis, 2000) and there has been relatively little research into educational outcomes (Roy & Rutter, 2006). The issue of underachievement is now high on the government agenda and actions are being taken to improve educational outcomes (see section 2.4.3).

#### **2.4.2. LAC AND UNDERACHIEVEMENT**

Underachievement has subsequently been attributed to a range of social, structural and professional factors (Francis, 2000). It has been suggested that LAC may become disaffected and lack motivation to attend school, their mental health difficulties and extreme behaviours may present a barrier to learning, and education may have to focus on developing the child's social skills and compliance before learning can take place (Guishard-Pine, McCall, & Hamilton, 2007).

Overtime research has moved away from a within child focus instead exploring potential barriers to learning within the education system (Fletcher-Campbell & Hall, 1990) and broader socio-economic spheres (Roy & Rutter, 2006). It is now recognised that underachievement is multi-factorial, including factors such as: failure to accelerate learning and to provide educationally stimulating and supportive care environment, disruption to schooling and pupil mobility, poor quality schools, high rates of exclusion and non-attendance, and low adult expectations (Axford, 2008; Goddard, 2000). It has also been suggested that the threshold for entry into care has increased, and consequently, the LAC cohort experiences a higher concentration of disadvantage which leads to poorer outcomes (Rowlands & Statham, 2009). For example, socio-economic factors associated with the pre-care experience, such as social class, predict lower academic achievement (Berridge, 2007).

Whilst providing care away from home may enable protection and well-being, it is argued many LAC do not receive good quality learning experiences (DCSF, 2009b); teaching staff have a limited understanding of the implications that early adversity and attachment difficulties can have on learning (Osborne, et al., 2009) and in general terms there is a need for a greater understanding of

the LAC population (Coulling, 2000). This insufficient knowledge is further compounded by poor levels of early communication between education departments and social work services and the varying levels of importance placed on academic achievement by professionals (Francis, 2000).

It is advocated we should conceptualise 'underachievement' as 'low achievement' to reduce further stigmatisation (Berridge, 2007). Where research has focused on the causality of low achievement it has been recognised that there is a gap in the literature which considers the perspectives of LAC and there is even less research on the perspective of the parents and teachers (Goddard, 2000). Research that has considered the views of LAC highlights a range of difficulties experienced including emotional difficulties at the point of entry into the care system, placement instability which adversely impacts the child's ability to concentrate, unnecessary school transfers, separation from friends, the challenges of arriving in the middle of the school term, no school uniform, no-one showing any interest in their education, and the challenges in overcoming negative stereotypes (Harker, Dobel-Ober, Lawrence, Berridge, & Sinclair, 2002).

Martin and Jackson (2002) conducted a retrospective investigation into the factors associated with educational success, through the use of semi-structured interviews with a sample of 38 children. The criteria for inclusion was the attainment of five O-levels or GCSE's at grade C or above and a subsample were then studied based on their A-level grades or equivalent qualifications; no specific details regarding this selection criteria is reported. This research asked participants to identify what factors would facilitate the educational success of other LAC, rather than identifying factors which contributed to their own success. The following themes were identified: the need for normalisation, greater encouragement from significant others, the need for carers who are well educated, qualified, and who promote the importance of school and regular attendance. Findings also detail the challenges of overcoming stereotyping and discrimination, the lack of practical resources, the need for greater support from teachers without stigmatising the child, and the lack of encouragement for higher education. Some positive



factors were identified such as positive relationships with social workers and the availability of a ‘guardian angel’; a relationship with at least one person within the care system who would listen to the child and make them feel valued. This study largely relies on the retrospective nature of recalling past events which has its own methodological restrictions (Elmes, Kantowitz, & Roediger III, 1995), and, whilst this is an attempt to explore educational success, it emanates from a deficit perspective where the focus is on accounting for poor outcomes rather than the factors which promote success. It is only recently that attention has been paid to the ways we can improve educational outcomes; this is explored in the following section.

### **2.4.3. IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES**

The ‘*Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care*’ paper (DFES, 2006a) identified a number of proposals to improve academic attainment including: priority admissions, access to personalised learning, a personal education allowance of £500, ensuring children do not move school unnecessarily, and, as of September 2009 schools are legally required to appoint a designated LAC teacher.

The DCSF (2009f) provided statutory guidance concerning the role of the designated LAC teacher. Key responsibilities include the promotion of educational achievement and facilitating a common understanding of the needs of LAC. The role also involves promoting high expectations within school, encouraging the LAC to contribute to their learning targets, providing educational support such as differentiation, acquiring 1:1 tuition as required, and, developing a shared understanding regarding the importance of education with carers. The designated LAC teacher is also responsible for the development of school policies and personal education plans (PEP), ensuring joined up working, and acting as an initial contact point for outside agencies. An annual report should be provided by the designated LAC and they should access appropriate training.

Further to this, it is suggested that every LA should have a ‘virtual school head’ who rigorously tracks the schooling of every LAC to ensure additional

targeted provision such as 1:1 tuition, and, to oversee the continuity of schooling (DCSF, 2009b).

Personal education plans (PEP) have also been introduced which form part of an overall care plan, identifying the child's needs and further support that is required, initiated by the social worker and written in partnership with parents, carers, child, and other professionals; this should be reviewed regularly (DFES, 2004c). It is suggested that this has helped to raise the profile of the educational needs (Hayden, 2005).

Most recently, the DCSF (2009g, 2009h) has provided guidance for primary and secondary schools which details key principles for good practice. It is proposed that schools should be doing more of what they are already doing: emphasising the importance of the individual child, promoting personalised learning, ensuring barriers to learning are addressed, and that academic progress is monitored and reviewed. The importance of the designated LAC teacher is again reiterated in terms of providing proactive support. It is also recognised that there should be a range of interventions available to support the development of social and academic skills. The following principles are also detailed:

- Balancing high levels of support with real challenge.
- Skilfully linking each child to a key person they relate to.
- Making it a priority to know children well and build strong relationships.
- Developing strong partnerships with carers, local authorities and specialist agencies.
- Making things happen and seeing things through.
- Ensuring consistency and flexibility.
- Actively extending the horizons of each child.
- Planning for future transitions is also included in the secondary school guidance.

The DCSF (2009b) also suggest that LAC are likely to benefit from consistent, personal, support and attention from an identified adult who demonstrates an

understanding of the child, and offers advice, support, and conveys high expectations and feelings of value and support.

Harker, et al., (2002) interviewed LAC aged 10 to 18 to ascertain which adults had provided the most support and findings highlighted the importance of teachers, carers, peers, family members, and social workers. The majority of participants acknowledged the importance of support provided by teaching staff in promoting their self-belief and encouraging their academic progress. LAC also offered suggestions for improving the educational experience and this included: better educational provision (this was mainly in relation to tuition services provided outside of school), increased levels of encouragement, further information about policy and rights to education and access funds, improved facilities such as a quiet study place and access to computers and resources, to be involved in the decision-making process, and for there to be an increased awareness of educational issues for LAC with social workers, teachers and peers.

In a review of good practice, Collarbone (2007) identifies that for many LAC school is a place of consistency, continuity, stability, and safety which should be celebrated. The following principles of good practice were identified:

- Schools should have a designated teacher who acts as a champion for children in care; this teacher should ensure their needs of LAC are met through facilitating positive relationships between children and the adults involved in the care of the child.
- There should be well-established procedures for children in care moving onto higher education institutions, supported through the implementation of personal educational plans.
- The school's governing body should take responsibility for championing the needs of children in care and access appropriate training.

- Ensuring children have access to extended services in and around schools.
- Regular school attendance should be encouraged through target setting and appointments with other services that are outside of school hours.
- Early intervention in accordance with behaviour management programs should be implemented to prevent school exclusions.
- Children should be encouraged to develop additional skills such as team working and problem-solving, and there should be emphasis on developing social and emotional skills of children in care.
- The importance of obtaining student voice in the decision-making process and professionals sharing the information collated appropriately.

This best practice report also recognises modifications that need to be made in the school admission process and that there needs to be improved communication between schools, social workers, and carers.

Kendall, Johnson, Gulliver, Martin, & Kinder (2004) evaluated the 'Vulnerable Children Grant', which is allocated to local authorities to improve access to education, to promote educational attainment and participation. The following areas of good practice were identified:

- Increased educational support (i.e. study skills, revision sessions, and homework clubs).
- Increased staffing (i.e. learning mentors and advisory teacher).
- Introduction of training programmes for schools and education staff.

- Maintaining provision (i.e. staff salaries, contributions to multi-agency teams).
- New work including new staff appointments (i.e. coordinators, designated teachers, advisory teachers, learning mentors, home tutors, social workers, education welfare, educational psychologists, youth workers and art therapists), additional resources, innovative projects and activities i.e. art projects and mental health projects.

The authors report that increased staffing levels focus not only on raising attainment and achievement but also promoting attendance, participation, reintegration and access; this included increasing access to leisure facilities, prize giving and celebrations. It was also reported that local authorities had developed partnerships with higher and further education institutes, buying in alternative provision, funding individual tutors, providing study support packs to aid secondary transition, providing reading initiatives, computer courses, and distance learning packages.

Interestingly, research has also considered the strengths of residential schools in Scotland, for those children who were accommodated through the juvenile justice system. Smith, McKay, & Chakrabarti (2004) identified strengths including: the regime and feelings of safety within the school, the relationships enjoyed with staff and peers, the range of activities available, how the centre facilitated contact with family, the lessons and educational provision available, and the child's relationships with social workers.

#### **2.4.4. SUMMARY OF ENJOY AND ACHIEVE**

It is well documented that LAC do not achieve as well as their non-looked after peers and this is a priority area for government attention. Research has identified this low achievement is multi-factorial and can be attributed to a range of emotional, environmental, social, and professional barriers.

Much of the research in this area has focused on justifying poor outcomes rather than considering the ways in which we can facilitate educational

achievement. Recent government guidance details best practice and identifies actions for improving outcomes i.e. through personalised learning, a designated LAC teacher, a virtual school head, and personal educational plans. These statutory duties should be complemented by actions to promote access to extended services, good attendance, and good behaviour. The importance of adult support has been recognised consistently, however, it is also recognised that there is a need for more training programmes for staff and carers, better school provision and practical resources, and interventions to target behaviour management and social skills development.

## **2.5. ACHIEVE ECONOMIC WELL-BEING**

The DfES (2004a) specify criterion for the ‘Achieve economic well-being’ outcome which includes the following: for children to engage in further education, employment or training when leaving school, to be ready for employment, to live in decent homes and sustainable communities, to access transport, and to live in households free from low income. Parents, families and carers are supported to be economically active.

### **2.5.1. NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING**

LAC are identified as a population who are at risk of social exclusion in adult life, which refers to both material deprivation and marginalisation (Social Exclusion Task Force, 2009). It is reported that many LAC experience difficulties when moving towards independence in early adulthood as they do not feel ready to leave care and they feel they have limited choices; this is further compounded by the lack of appropriate accommodation and support that is available (Centrepint, 2006).

Adverse, long-term, outcomes have been reported including higher victimisation rates, suicide rates, and a third of adults who had been looked after, aged 16-24 years, had a criminal conviction (Pritchard & Butler, 2000a, 2000b). Adults who have previously lived in care are over-represented within the homeless, mental health, and early pregnancy statistics (National Care Advisory Service, 2006). And whilst trends over the past five years have identified an increased percentage of care leavers are in education,

employment or training at the time of their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday, recent figures suggest this only accounts for 63% of the care leavers population (DCSF, 2009c). There is also a great variability in education, employment, and training outcomes in local authorities across England (Social Exclusion Task Force, 2009).

These outcomes have been attributed to the quality of care received whilst looked after, the transition process, and the level of support received after leaving care (Stein, 2006). A number of recommendations have been made to increase the likelihood of a successful transition to adulthood, through government initiatives such as 'Care2Work' which aims to support care leavers into employment, provide appropriate training for Personal Advisors, and improve the quality of Pathway Plans (Social Exclusion Task Force, 2009). However, in order to achieve economic well-being it is essential children have the best start in life, that they are emotionally secure, and that they have accessed a good quality education.

#### **2.5.2. SUMMARY OR ACHIEVE ECONOMIC WELL-BEING**

Whilst an extensive review of the literature in this area is beyond the scope of this thesis, this literature does identify that LAC are at risk of social exclusion when leaving care, and, there are a considerable number of LAC who are not in education, employment, or training on their 19th birthday. The literature also highlights a range of adverse outcomes in terms of health, safety, and emotional well-being.

There is a need for greater support during the transition period to ensure children are able to achieve economic well-being. It is also essential that the basic life and learning skills are acquired during compulsory school education to give the LAC the best possible start in adult life.

#### **2.6. MAKE A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION**

The DfES (2004a) specify criterion for the 'Make a Positive Contribution' outcome which includes engagement in decision-making, engaging in law-abiding and positive behaviour, developing positive relationships, developing

self-confidence, and to develop enterprising behaviour. Parents, carers and families are responsible for promoting positive behaviour.

The previous sections in this chapter have considered the challenges LAC experience, how this impacts upon their engagement with school and learning, and how this subsequently affects opportunities for further education, employment and training. This section of the literature review will focus on the contributions LAC can make and the importance of obtaining the voice of the child to inform service development.

### **2.6.1. THE VOICE OF THE LAC**

Over recent years there has been an increase in attention paid to the importance of accessing and understanding children's perspectives of their own life and circumstances (Clarke, McQuail, & Moss, 2003). The ECM agenda, which aims to promote outcomes, advocates the need for services to collate the views of children and young people, to put children at the centre of service reform (DFES, 2004a); service efficacy is now measured by the impact made on children and young people (Soan, 2006). It is therefore paramount that professionals have a good understanding of the needs of LAC and what they want from services (Meltzer, et al., 2003); the biggest challenge is how adults can collate the views of the child in a meaningful way (Hayes, 2004).

The government have a responsibility to fulfil the Children's Act (HMSO, 1989), the Human Rights Act (HMSO, 1998) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Article 12 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child states:

*'State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.'*

LAC are no exception and should have a say in decisions which affect them (Axford, 2008), with a plethora of authors indicating the view of LAC should be



taken seriously to inform policy and practice (Martin & Jackson, 2002). This is recognised across the professional domains, for example, social care teams are exploring participatory report writing practices (Roose, Mottart, Dejonckheere, van Nijnatten, & De Bie, 2009). It is emphasised that not only should we listen to the voice of LAC we must act on their suggestions; in doing so we should make a concerted effort to celebrating the good and recognise the challenges (McGinnity, 2007).

LAC have reported they feel a lack of control and a lack of choice in decision-making (Axford, 2008). This is particularly evident in research findings which relate to attendance at planning meetings and reviews. Thomas & O'Kane (1999) report that some LAC perceive these meetings as a positive experience and an opportunity to be heard, to receive information about their care or educational situation, and to hear what adults have to say. Other LAC have attended as it was an 'expectation' and subsequently reported feelings of exposure, embarrassment, that they have not been listened to, that they did not feel confident, and they did not understand the purpose of the meeting.

Munro (2001) interviewed 15 LAC aged between 10 and 17 who had been in care for at least two years. The interview focused on asking children how much insight they had into what was happening to them, whether they felt that they were listened to, and whether they felt they were involved in decision-making processes. The research interview was predominantly unstructured which gave the child the opportunity to raise issues they perceived to be important. Whilst some children perceived their participation in reviews as problem-free and pleasant, others reported they felt powerless and frustrated as their plans were not implemented and their wishes were overruled. It was reported that LAC had little awareness of the complaints system if they had concerns about their care and many LAC stated they would rather have an adult to act as an advocate for them and to relay their concerns; potential advocates included birth relatives, carers, teachers, and social workers. Older children also raised concerns regarding the lack of confidentiality which led to reluctance to share thoughts and feelings as it was felt this information would be collated and read by strangers. Whilst these

findings are interesting there were no reflections on the use of unstructured interviews in obtaining the voice of the LAC, how the process was facilitated, or recommendations for further applications of this methodology.

McLeod (2007) acknowledges that the voices of socially excluded and marginalised groups of children are less likely to be heard as this is not an easy task. The author states a range of challenges in communicating with LAC such as avoidance, active resistance, aggression and passive resistance. LAC may also provide inaccurate information and they may demonstrate denial or exaggeration. It is also recognised that LAC have been reluctant to discuss their personal history, having experienced trauma and loss, and, there are greater difficulties communicating during times of distress and difficulty. Consequently the child may wish to change the subject which is beyond the control of the researcher. From a methodological perspective the use of opening questions was deemed ineffective, and the author concludes that in order to effectively elicit the views of LAC this must be done in more imaginative ways, for example, through the use of artwork; researchers must be prepared for resistance and challenge and they must be open to the unexpected.

An initial search of literature in this area suggests there is limited published research detailing the most effective ways of obtaining the voice of the LAC, to ensure they are able to exercise their rights, and to make valued contributions which are not simply tokenistic. Research tends to detail the outcomes of the research questions, rather than the efficacy of methodologies used.

For example, Davies and Wright (2008) conducted a literature synthesis using databases, citation, and reference searches, to ascertain the LAC's voice in relation to mental health services. It was reported there are a paucity of studies in this area and that LAC are often excluded from such studies. Little attention was paid within this article to the methodology used to capture the child's voice, however, it was concluded vulnerable children, with support, are able to provide balanced views and that they are keen to participate.

Most recently, Holland (2009) conducted a broad review of the Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts of international published research since 2003, to ascertain the methodologies most frequently used for collating the views of LAC. Through this search only 44 articles were identified from ten nations. Given that these children are our most vulnerable greater research in this area is clearly required. The author further details the range of research designs used. Samples sizes ranged from four to 920 and methodology included: qualitative interviewing, standardised measures, surveys, observation, ethnography, focus groups, multi-modal qualitative design and family sculpting. Half of the studies were qualitative and half were quantitative, a quarter incorporated longitudinal elements, and some were comparative against the general population. The author's account is largely descriptive and no reference is made to the methods that are most effective. The author did however identify that there are limited research papers focusing on young children under 8, placement types appear to influence methodological choices for example it is easier to conduct observations in settings such as children's homes rather than foster care provision, papers contained little discussion of ethical issues, and research designs were inflexible in allowing young people's constructs of their experiences to come through.

As a final point in this section, Heptinstall (2000) documents a range of challenges in recruiting LAC for research. Difficulties include barriers to obtaining consent, consent being declined due to the child's current difficulties in placements, adult perceptions of having to 'protect' vulnerable children from participation due to potential adverse effects, and high attrition rates. Additionally, when LAC are recruited, Blower et al., (2004) emphasises there are further challenges as the most common methodological approaches are interviews and questionnaires, which generate largely qualitative data, and there are problems arising in knowing the best ways of interpreting this data in a meaningful way.

#### **2.6.2. SUMMARY OF POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION**

As professionals, it is essential that we listen to the voice of the LAC and that we put their views at the centre of service development and reform. LAC

have reported a lack of control and choice in the decision making processes and where children have had opportunities to participate in meetings this has been an unpleasant and embarrassing experience, LAC have reported feeling powerless and frustrated, and they were concerned regarding the confidentiality of information shared.

We therefore need to be able to capture the voice of the LAC in a way that is sensitive and meaningful. Whilst there is literature which reports the views of the child there is little focus on the most effective methodology for doing this and research designs have been criticised for their inflexibility; it is recognised this needs to be conducted in an imaginative and supportive way. As professionals we have a responsibility to overcome the barriers of engaging LAC and not only must we listen to their views we must act on them too.

In the final part of this chapter, attention will now be paid to the role of the Educational Psychologist in promoting positive outcomes for LAC.

## **2.7. THE ROLE OF THE EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST**

The role of the Educational Psychologist (EP) is to:

*'apply psychology to promote the attainment and health emotional development of children and young people from 0-19 years'* (DfEE, 2000, p. 5).

By providing a uniquely psychological perspective, EPs can offer explanations for complex behaviours through identifying mediating variables, and, can support positive outcomes through the implementation of evidence based strategies for change and the promotion of big ideas from the field of psychology (Cameron, 2006).

Educational Psychologists have a valuable role in supporting vulnerable pupils, especially those who are looked after (Jackson & McParlin, 2005). The DECP (2006) reviewed the role of EPs designated to work with LAC and concluded that due to the range of knowledge and skills, EPs are able to influence the

practice of others to provide appropriate and effective support. Areas of intervention include supporting school attendance, reducing exclusions, enhancing emotional well-being, supporting continuity in school placements, promoting attainment and providing advice on educational issues.

A questionnaire survey by Osborne, et al., (2009) explored the role of EPs working with LAC, across all psychology services in England, not just those with designated EP roles. In particular this focused on the amount of time spent working with LAC, the activities conducted, the perceived importance of such work and any barriers. It was identified that there was a wide variation of time spent working with LAC and that many EPs felt the amount of time they spent working this vulnerable group and the amount of time they would like to spend were highly incongruent; this was mainly due to service capacity and time restrictions. The type of work undertaken was predominantly:

- Consultation on educational needs with other professions, parents and carers; intervention programmes to support academic attainment; acting as a point of contact for support and advice; assessment work to clarify learning needs.
- Training and support to a range of professionals, parents and carers, ranging from issues relating to complex casework, SEN arrangements, therapeutic support techniques, attachment, emotional literacy and behaviour support; educational surgeries or consultation sessions;
- Fostering and adoption panels.

Kendall, et al., (2004), cite a case study where money was used to fund a part time EP to develop a mental health project targeting LAC. The project was designed to promote mental health issues and identify areas for support. In doing so the EP provided:

- Interventions with individual teachers
- Staff training

- Solution focused work with carers and children
- Group supervision with social workers
- Workshops on loss and bereavement, anger, withdrawal, anxiety and self esteem.

Osborne et al., (2009) recognise that there is a need for EPs to have a greater amount of time to work with LAC, professionals, and adults, to provide group training, consultation, advice, direct work with children and their families, assessments and therapeutic support. EPs have indicated a desire to provide proactive support and interventions, to develop strong links and good practice with other agencies and closer links with schools through training and support to enhance practice with LAC.

It is also important to recognise that EPs have a core role advocating for children which is not captured in the studies above. In doing so EPs have a range of methodologies available such as visual means (Hayes, 2004) computer based resources, mosaics, conversation and consultation (Knight, Clark, Petrie, & Statham, 2006). EPs also have a core role as applied researchers which is often overlooked, perhaps due to time constraints. However, opportunities to obtain qualitative information are essential in gaining a true picture of the needs of LAC and such research has a fundamental role in service development (Ward, 2004).

## **2.8. SUMMARY: PART 1 - LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

LAC are one of the most vulnerable pupil groups within the education system (section 2.1). As corporate parents and professionals we are responsible for promoting the five every child matters outcomes: to be healthy, to stay safe, to enjoy and achieve, to achieve economic well-being, and to make a positive contribution. The literature reviewed here highlights the pervasive difficulties and vulnerabilities experienced by LAC and how these difficulties can impact on all areas of emotional well-being and behaviour (section 2.2 & 2.3). All of the ECM outcomes are interlinked and it is important to consider the impact of a child not fulfilling the criteria to be healthy or to stay safe and how this

subsequently impacts upon the child's ability to enjoy and achieve and to make a positive contribution.

Within education a number of barriers and facilitative factors have been identified to explain the low achievement of LAC (section 2.4.2). Whilst many issues pertain to social and environmental facts which are perhaps beyond our remit within the field of education, we have a key role to play in shaping educational services to ensure they are operating at their best and that they provide a safe and consistent environment, to enable learning to take place.

In moving forward and developing services is it important that we capture the voice of the child to inform development, and we should use this voice to improve the school experience of LAC, to positively influence progress with learning. LAC are able to articulate and provide valuable contributions and it is important we utilise this; however the challenge is finding the most effective way of doing this (section 2.6.1).

The role of the EP is broad and dynamic and aims to promote attainment and healthy development of all children, including those who are looked after. This can be achieved through consultation, training, and support, at the individual, group, organisational and systemic level. It is however reported that the time available for working with such vulnerable young people is minimal, compromised by service workloads and time constraints. EPs are however in a fortunate position, having a unique opportunity to work with schools and create positive change, to advocate for children, to apply research skills, and, to promote big ideas within the field of psychology (section 2.7).

It is acknowledged that much of the research pertaining to LAC emanates from a deficit perspective and research has been undertaken to justify poor outcomes, rather than exploring and celebrating the achievements and successes of LAC. This perspective is further reinforced through the literature review presented here which focuses on deficits and problems. However, in order to provide a holistic account of the LAC it is difficult to summarise the literature in this area without adopting a negativistic and within-child

approach. Therefore the challenge for EPs is to find innovative and creative ways of moving forward in our work with LAC and to consider how we can reframe this area of inquiry. One of the big ideas currently emerging in the field of education and psychology is Appreciative Inquiry (AI). This is an affirmatively orientated approach for research and development, which utilises the voice of all stakeholders within an organisation, to identify strengths and successes and consider how we can build upon this to create change and improve outcomes. AI methodology therefore has the potential to provide a new lens on this historically problematic area; this is explored in the following chapter.



## CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW - APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

### 3.1. DEFINING AI

Appreciative inquiry is defined as:

*“...the cooperative, evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations and communities, and the world around them. It involves systematic discovery of what gives ‘life’ to an organization or community when it is most effective, and most capable in economic, ecological, and human terms” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2007, p.75).*

Appreciative inquiry in its simplest definition is a method of inquiry based upon actively seeking out and exploring the best of what is already working well within an organisation (Carter, Ruhe, Weyer, Litaker, Fry, & Stange, 2006) and building upon that success (Espinosa, et al., 2002). AI focuses on discovering what gives life to an organisation and identifying the organisations best attributes, whilst encouraging individuals to envisage the organisational future (Kobayashi, 2005). AI is therefore grounded in affirmation, appreciation, and dialogue which are thought to be key factors in its transformational capacity (Carter, et al., 2006). The use of dialogue and conversations focuses the participant’s attention on what is valued most in an existing system and provokes curiosity regarding what the future may look like if those values grew stronger and more prevalent (Frantz, 1998).

Organisations are thought to grow and change in the direction of what they study; exploring positive experiences and success enhances creativity and energy for creating change, rather than traditional approaches which can become entrenched in problem talk where participants may feel overwhelmed by barriers to change (Lewis, Passmore, & Cantore, 2007). AI is challenging the existing realm of traditional problem-orientated approaches as it focuses on the positive attributes that may drive change (Grant & Humphries, 2006). The strongly affirmative focus informs the research design, the questions used, the data analysis and the feedback given, making it an ultimately unique approach (Fitzgerald, Murrell, & Miller, 2003). It is therefore both a

philosophical orientation and a way of thinking; it can be defined as a process, method, intervention or practice (van Vuuren & Crous, 2005).

### 3.2. WHAT IS AI?

Cooperrider and Srivastva first introduced AI as a method for organisational change in 1987. AI was advocated as an approach which could overcome resistance to change, as resistance can occur even when the change is one that is desired by an organisation or setting (Johnson & Leavitt, 2001). This is achieved through understanding the reality for the organisation and investigating personal successes, to create change that is meaningful rather than attempting to create a 'universal truth' (Sekerka & McCraty, 2004).

Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) advocate that AI is based on a number of principles listed below; the first and third principles in particular make AI unique from conventional organisational development. All inquiry should:

1. Begin with appreciation
2. Be applicable
3. Be provocative
4. Be collaborative

These initial principles have been extended by Hammond (1998) who details a number of assumptions which encapsulate all areas of the AI philosophy:

- In every society, organisation or group, something works.
- What we focus on becomes our reality.
- Reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities.
- The art of asking questions of an organisation or group influences the group in some way.
- People have more confidence and comfort to journey into the future when they carry forward parts of the past.
- If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past.
- It is important to value differences.

- The language we use creates our reality.

### 3.3. THE 4-D CYCLE

AI follows a systematic process known as the 4-D cycle (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001). A description of the model, and the individual stages, are illustrated below:

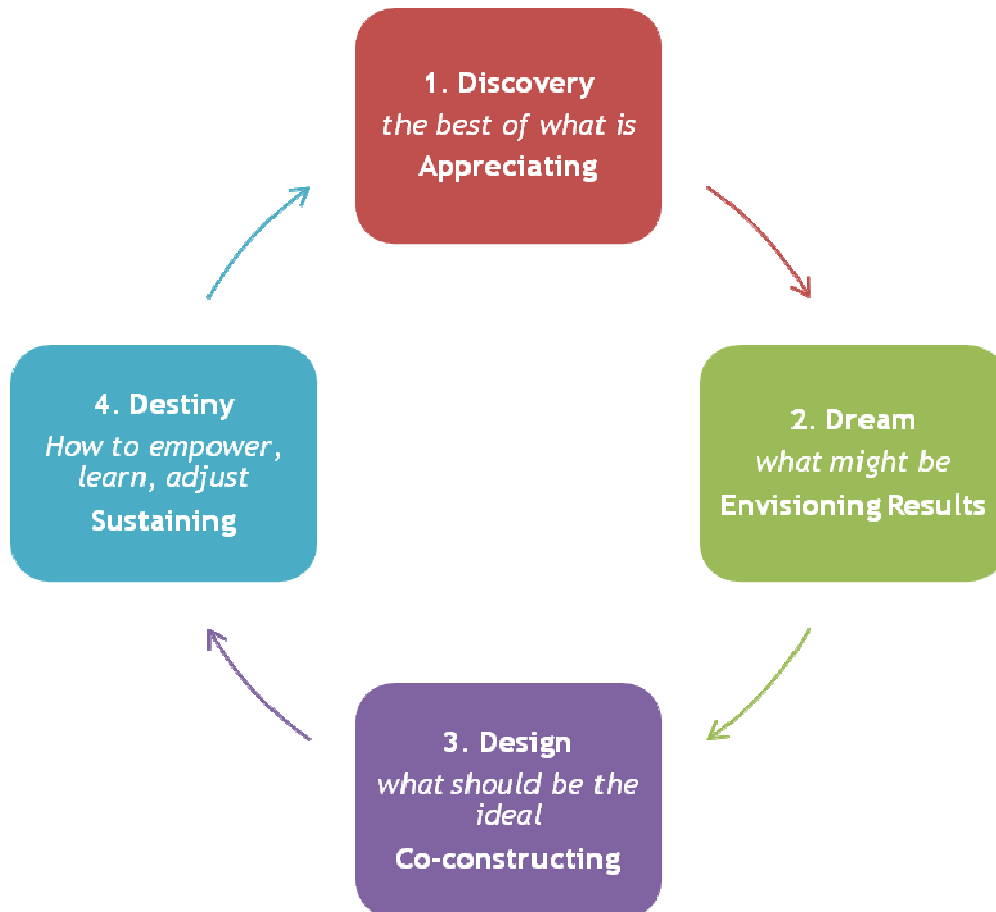


Figure 1.1. Appreciative Inquiry 4D Cycle (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1987; 2001).

The first three stages encourage participants to create positive images and ideas about the topic of study that are compelling enough for participants to begin transforming working practices (Bushe & Kassam, 2005). Imagery is thought to be central to the AI process, with the belief that positive imagery leads to positive change. It has been argued that AI has the power to create

collective images of the future (Fitzgerald, et al., 2003) and this visualisation is thought to create powerful and satisfying pictures of individuals at their best; this focus on achievement stimulates action and eliminates cynicism evoked by a problem solving approach (Gates, 2002). Creating these positive images, phrased as ‘artful creation’, requires more than simply talking them and it is essential that individuals fully engage to move forward (Nissely, 2004). This is referred to as the anticipatory principle which suggests our actions are guided by our images of the future. This combines with positive, poetic, and constructionist principles which are detailed further in section 4.6.

Before discussing each stage of the 4-D cycle it is important to highlight that some authors advocate a fifth stage to the AI model, prior to the discovery phase, called the ‘defining stage’. It is in this crucial stage that the focus of the inquiry is collaboratively defined between stakeholders and this is deemed essential for AI to work effectively (Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Fitzgerald, et al., 2003).

### **3.3.1. DISCOVERY**

The first stage of the 4-D cycle is designed to identify the sources that give life to the organisation and to evoke positive potential (van Vuuren & Crous, 2005); this is achieved through reflection of personal experiences when the organisation has been operating at its best (Bushe & Kassam, 2005). The goal is to enliven the change process through storytelling and positive imagery (van Vuuren & Crous, 2005).

### **3.3.2. DREAM**

The aim of the dream stage is to connect the future with the past and envisage the organisations greatest potential for positive action (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001). The goal here is to encourage participants to dream about what could be different if the organisation was working at its best at all times (Christie, 2006).

### **3.3.3. DESIGN**

This third stage is perhaps the most challenging. The aim of this stage is to turn the participant's attention to creating the ideal organisation and designing the future of the organisation (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001). This stage bridges the previous discover and dream stages, confirming visions through the development of provocative propositions, or, 'possibility statements' which describe the ideal. This stage is thought to redirect the organisation by co-creating a clear and compelling personalised vision of how things will be (van Vuuren & Crous, 2005). AI is deemed unique in the sense that future images emerge through grounded examples of the organisations success and positive experience (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001).

### **3.3.4. DESTINY**

The final stage encourages a commitment from stakeholders to ensure cooperation and change based upon the positive core strengths identified in the stages prior to the destiny stage (van Vuuren & Crous, 2005). The key to this stage is to give the AI back to the participants fully and to step back (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001); change was seen to occur in those situations in which researchers tended to guide the process less (Bushe & Kassam, 2005). This stage was initially referred to as the 'deliver' stage but this was amended to 'destiny' to reflect the essence of this final stage, which is to create plans and processes that encourage and nurture actions, initiated by participants. There appear to be limited descriptive reports in the literature regarding the actions undertaken within this stage, however, if the visioning activities in the early stages are done well it is proposed evolutionary change will occur naturally (Frantz, 1998).

### **3.3.5. SUMMARY OF THE 4-D CYCLE**

AI is a strongly affirmative method of inquiry which challenges deficit problem-solving models through actively seeking and discovering the best of what is already happening within an organisation and building upon that success. Inquiry should be appreciative, applicable, provocative, and collaborative.

AI follows a systematic framework, the 4-D cycle: discover, dream, design and destiny; prior to this is the define stage where the focus of inquiry is collaboratively negotiated. AI is also grounded by a number of theoretical principles: anticipatory, constructionism, positivism, and poeticism. As such, AI is an approach which generates knowledge, models, theories, and acts as a 'generative metaphor' encouraging action (Bushe & Kassam, 2005).

There are however many unanswered questions associated with learning a new methodology, which will be explored in the following sections, including:

- What are the advantages of adopting an affirmative and appreciative approach?
- How has AI been applied in practice?
- How effective is the approach?
- What skills does one require to become an AI researcher?

#### **3.4. THE BENEFITS OF AN APPRECIATIVE FOCUS**

AI is a framework which aims to identify the best of what is and it challenges typically problem-orientated approaches to research which aim to identify a problem and then fix it. Instead it reframes research and aims to enhance organisations, people, and events (Carter, et al., 2006). Typically, deficit or problem-solving approaches focus on problem identification, analysis, solutions, and action plans, contrasting with an AI approach which appreciates, envisions and discusses (Kobayashi, 2005). AI focuses on dialogue and envisaging what could be; perceived problems are 'mysteries' that should be embraced (Espinosa, et al., 2002). AI is gaining credibility as an approach to challenge problem-solving approaches which have historically been widely accepted within the field of research (Fitzgerald et al., 2003).

Focusing on problems is unlikely to encourage creativity, innovation, excitement or enjoyment (Christie, 2006) and if we focus on delving into problems, we will keep finding problems (Kobayashi, 2005). Barrett (1995) argues that if we focus solely on problems we are at risk of limiting our inquiry; if we focus on deficiencies and fragment the world we are attempting

to understand we create separation between stakeholders. In contrast, if we focus on the positives we can engage with individuals in a way that promotes a search for solutions (Gates, 2002) and cynicism is overcome by idea generation (Sekerka & McCraty, 2004). Within AI 'problems' are still identified but in a different manner, the questions used enable acknowledgement of problems or frustrations and then the researcher can steer participants in another direction, having given the individual time and space to communicate their concerns (Christie, 2006).

Anecdotally, researchers report that AI is an interesting, stimulating and creative method of researching (Carter et al., 2006); it is visionary, inspiring and aspirational (van Vuuren & Crous, 2005). Due to its affirmative focus it encourages participants to become positive, lively, and engaged in the process (Sekerka & McCraty, 2004). AI is therefore perceived to be a methodology which genuinely supports the notion of working collaboratively due to the high degree of participation required in contrast to participants becoming the 'subjects' of research (Carter et al., 2006).

The AI process is also reported to build relationships, to develop mutual understanding, trust, and enhance collaboration within an organisation (Fitzgerald, et al., 2003). As AI allows time for reflection and storytelling researchers have also reported an increasing enthusiasm amongst individuals; AI provides an opportunity to speak openly and a willingness to hear each other's stories (Gates, 2002). There are also personal benefits of engaging in positively orientated activities, including the experience of positive emotions which enhances general well-being and human experience (Sekerka & McCraty, 2004). It is also reported organisational productivity, efficacy and motivation improves, as individuals focus on what they already perceive to be beneficial to the organisation and this shift in focus leads to continuous improvement as the participants sustain their focus on what already works (Kobayashi, 2005). This positive focus during inquiry is thought to generate positive energy as a bi-product of the process (Fitzgerald, et al., 2003).

### **3.5. AI IN PRACTICE**

A review of the literature pertaining to AI identifies numerous examples of AI in practice which is attributed to the non-prescriptive approach which enables flexibly across a variety of contexts. There is also the belief that individuals working within organisations already have the expertise to design and develop viable and sustainable changes to enhance organisational functioning and AI is achievable (Frantz, 1998). Applications of AI in practice will be highlighted in the following sections before focusing on the applications of AI within the field of education.

Organisationally, AI has been used across a variety of contexts from strategic planning, exploring best practice, transformation of cultures, promoting social change and organisational capacity building (Fitzgerald et al., 2003; Postma, 1998); AI has also been employed by voluntary organisations (Reed, Jones and Irvine, 2005) and within innovative government visioning projects (Johnson and Leavitt, 2001). A detailed example of AI in organisational practice is detailed below.

van Vuuren and Crous (2005) used AI as a framework for developing ethical practice and policy within a business organisation and then explored the participant's experience of AI. 36 staff members were invited to attend three AI sessions equating to 12 hours. This involved a series of small group sessions aligned with the 4-D cycle including: brainstorming activities, AI questioning, synthesis of themes, visions and priorities and the development of provocative propositions. The research cycle culminated with the formulation of a code of ethics. From the researchers' perspective AI was perceived to be a useful and powerful intervention to move away from policy development driven by problem solving and external pressures. The use of AI encouraged a shift to an affirmative focus, utilising a collaborative, participative, action research approach and this enabled participants to develop a shared meaning of ethics and create a new way forward. A 'valuation' was then conducted to invite participants to reflect on their experience and it was reported participants felt the process exceeded initial expectations; they felt valued, they reported



the process was powerful, especially the experience of visioning, and they valued the fact there was a tangible outcome.

AI has also been used within healthcare settings to support staff development in delivering effective health care services (Baker & Wright, 2006), to support and enhance patient transition between care environments (Shendell-Falik, Feinson, & Mohr, 2007), to enhance nurse retention and the quality of patient care (Havens, Wood, & Leeman, 2006) and as a leadership style to facilitate change (Keefe & Pesut, 2004; Sherwood, 2006). AI has been successfully adapted into health care settings as professionals clearly adhere to the AI principles and the 4-D cycle. For example, Reed et al., (2002) used AI to investigate the process of patient discharge from hospital. This was structured over three AI workshops: firstly appreciative semi-structured interviews (discover), secondly, data analysis and development of provocative propositions (dream and design) and finally, action planning based on the provocative propositions composed (destiny). It was reported by the authors that the use of AI as a framework provided a stimulating and useful method for identify key research themes.

The literature referred to above, although not extensive, highlights the applicability of AI across a variety of domains. AI is perceived as an effective framework for research and development (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2007), as an interview tool (Michael, 2005), for evaluations (Christie, 2006) and as a framework for developing group cohesion and team building (Bushe & Coetzer, 1995; Peelle, 2006). As AI continues to gain credibility it is moving into new domains; there is promising research emerging which illustrates the use of AI within community development (Finegold, Holland, & Lingham, 2002), transforming working practice in prisons (Liebling, Elliott, & Arnold, 2001), and there is evidence emerging which details the use of AI in education settings, this is detailed further in the following section.

### **3.6. AI AND EDUCATION**

In order to get a true understanding of the applications of AI within the field of education a systematic review was conducted. Torgerson (2003) highlights

a systematic review has a number of strengths. It enables the researcher to address specific research questions, following a systematic process using explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria which in turn reduces bias. It also focuses the researcher on appraising the quality of information, explicitly synthesising findings and identifying gaps in the knowledge base.

This review was conducted using a systematic method adopted from Badger, Nursten, Williams, & Woodward (2000) and Torgerson (2003) using the following stages:

1. Definition of the problem, inclusion and exclusion criteria
2. The search strategy
3. Criteria for the evaluation of studies
4. Data extraction
5. Summarised into a synthesis
6. Findings reported.

### **3.6.1. DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM**

This systematic literature review aims to answer the following questions:

- How has appreciative inquiry been applied within the field of education, particularly within secondary schools?
- How has appreciative inquiry been used with children of compulsory school age?

### **3.6.2. SEARCH STRATEGY**

A number of electronic databases, held by the University of Manchester library services, known to be useful in the field of education and psychology were used in the initial literature search of academic journals. The following combinations of key words were used when searching each of the electronic databases: appreciative inquiry and child\* (wild card), young people / young person, pupil, student, secondary school, school, education, educational psychology. The results are detailed in table 2.1 overleaf:

Database Used	Number of Articles Returned
British Education Index	34
Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC)	102
Australian Education Index	42
PsycINFO	49
Web of Knowledge / Web of Science	51
<b>Initial total</b>	<b>280</b>
Total number of duplicated articles removed <sup>1</sup>	189
<b>Final total</b>	<b>89</b>

*Table 2.1. Systematic literature review - initial results*

### 3.6.3. CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION

References and abstracts of the 89 articles found were downloaded to review for relevancy. The following criteria were used:

Inclusion criteria:

- Articles were sought from 1987 until the current year 2010 (this was the year that AI was first described);
- Articles must be published in peer-reviewed journals and of an empirical nature;
- Articles must be based on the use of appreciative inquiry within educational settings;
- Articles must detail the use of AI with children and young people of compulsory school age;
- No restrictions were set regarding the country the research originated from.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the number of search terms used, a considerable number of articles were duplicated within searches and within databases.

Exclusion criteria:

- Articles where sampled participants were post secondary school (i.e. children over 16, in colleges, universities);
- Where research took place within the wider context of education i.e. medical studies;
- Papers written in a language other than English.

This led to the exclusion of 66 articles; details of the excluded papers can be found in Appendix 1.

#### **3.6.4. INFORMATION SYNTHESIS**

A total of 23 articles met the inclusion criteria and are reviewed as part of this information synthesis. Many of the papers that were excluded were studies which had taken place within healthcare, medical education settings, and business settings and are therefore not relevant to this information synthesis. This breadth of findings does however reinforce both the popularity and the applicability of AI.

A number of studies identified within this systematic review utilise AI as their main frame of reference but will not be explored here in detail as they are not relevant to the present research. For example McAdama & Mirza (2009) provided a descriptive and anecdotal account of AI as an approach to support individuals in changing their undesirable behaviours i.e. drug-taking and criminal offences; however the majority of participants were beyond school age (aged 15-25 years). The account does however demonstrate AI has the capacity to engage vulnerable and marginalised members of society, in a way that was liberating, creating hopes and dreams, and leading to positive change.

#### **3.6.5. AI AND EDUCATION SETTINGS**

There were numerous examples of the application of AI within the field of education however, in these studies children and young people were not active participants. For example AI has been used to develop kindergarten

programmes (Bezzina, 2008) as a framework for continuing professional development and for staff retreats (Clarke, Egan, Fletcher, & Ryan, 2006; Markova & Holland, 2005) and as a tool for individual reflection regarding career progression (Luckcock, 2007). AI has also been used for evaluation purposes, for example of HIV/AIDS education programs (Govender & Edwards, 2009), of science enrichment programmes (Quintanilla & Packard, 2002), of school systems (Steyn, 2009); as a methodology for school improvement (Smith, 2005) and to ascertain core values of educational practice and develop school projects (McKenzie, 2003). AI has also been used to inform 'appreciative learning' where students are encouraged to be heard, to explore, to dream, and take actions, whilst teachers do not practice criticism, disapproval, or condemnation; children who partake in appreciative learning were found to develop a better self perception in terms of creativity in learning (Eow, Ali, Mahmud, & Baki, 2010). Similarly, the principles of AI have informed the development of appreciative pedagogy to create positive models of learning (Yballe & O'Connor, 2000).

AI has also been advocated as an effective methodology for exploring inclusive practice; this has been attributed to the fact AI is strengths based, it personalises the change process, it acknowledges the past and understands the present, and it encourages accountability (Kozik, Cooney, Vinciguerra, Gradel, & Black, 2009). AI has also been used to develop sustainable partnerships between high schools and universities (Calabrese, 2006); AI was implemented as a supportive process for a high school where there was poor academic progress and high rates of student attrition. The authors advocate AI with key staff acted as a catalyst for reflection which enabled the researchers to leave the school to enable the destiny phase to happen.

#### **3.6.6. AI AND 'AT-RISK' PUPILS**

It is important to highlight three other papers which were identified that detail the use of AI to improve outcomes for vulnerable populations. Whilst only one of these studies utilise children as participants it is useful to consider all of their contributions within the context of this thesis. Calabrese, Hummel, & San (2007) conducted a study to challenge the beliefs of teachers and administrators and to change attitudes towards 'at-risk' students; at-risk

pupils were defined as those pupils who were underperforming academically. AI was the favoured method as the researchers argue that there is an overwhelming focus on deficit-based research on at-risk students and there is limited research of at-risk population using AI methodology. Teachers, administrators, school principal, and counsellors, participated in this research which aimed to explore the positive core of actions, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of staff working with at-risk students and their parents. Through individual interviews, focus groups, and review of school documentation key themes were identified and actions developed. Whilst the account can be challenged as the authors do not detail how data gathered was fed back to the school or how any actions were developed, some interesting conclusions can be drawn. The authors advocate that AI can build a new relationship between teachers and the at risk population as it provides a safe place to discuss core experiences and reframes challenges with positivism and optimism.

Similarly, Calabrese, Goodvin, & Niles (2005) used AI within a challenging, ethnically diverse, high school, where a new principal had been appointed to improve discipline, raise attainment, and work more effectively within a diverse community. A qualitative case study approach was used to identify the attitudes and traits of teachers which supported effective learning, utilising focused interviews with teachers, school counsellors, and administrators, further focus groups with teachers, and a review of school documentation. The researcher identified a range of themes, effective traits and attributes. Implications for future practice were proposed and a model was developed for other similar high schools. This account again lacks information regarding the feedback process of the themes obtained and there is a lack of clarity concerning the action planning phase, for example, staff development around communication is identified as a key action however the source of this action is unclear.

Ryan, Soven, Smither, Sullivan, & Van Buskirk (1999) detail the use of AI within an urban Catholic high school in the USA to explore schools efficacy in meeting the needs of minority and disadvantaged students. The researchers taught school administrators, teachers, students, and parents the AI process and each

person conducted AI interviews, the second half of the interview involved specific questions regarding the efficacy of particular school dimensions. The findings were transcribed and distributed to selected interviewers before the group met to analyse the data for common themes; these were then condensed into propositions. These propositions were then rated on a Likert scale by all members of the school community, regarding whether propositions were 'ideal' or 'real'. The authors summarise that the data provided identified strengths and weaknesses within the school program that staff could refine and build on. No information is given regarding the design or destiny stage, or how the information was fed back to the school. There was also no evaluation of the AI process or the participant's experiences; however the authors argue that AI enabled a deeper understanding and appreciation of the school.

#### **3.6.7. AI UTILISING THE VOICE OF THE CHILD**

Through this systemic review seven studies were identified which utilised AI as a methodological framework for research within education settings, including children. Calabrese, et al., (2008) completed a qualitative case study, with three school districts in a Midwestern state in America to examine the efficacy of the 'circle of friends program', used to support the inclusion of children with disabilities. Data was obtained through focus group semi-structured interviews and an online survey, complimented by detailed field notes and observations and audio recordings. Participants included staff, children, and parents. The authors report that AI was used to discover the participant's positive core experiences, however no information is provided on how AI was implemented and the focus is on outcomes of the circle of friends intervention, there is no indication the researcher followed the 4-D cycle and the account focuses on the positive outcomes of the circle of friends programme.

Carnell (2005) used AI to explore the perceptions of young boys and their teachers regarding the success of a magazine which aimed to promote boys reading, widen aspirations, and overcome underachievement in this area. The study incorporated five secondary schools in the UK and each school organised

three groups of up to 5 young people in years nine, 10 and 11 to be interviewed; interviews lasted between 40 and 50 minutes and children and staff were interviewed separately. Participants were asked about the best features of the magazine and their wider experiences of reading. Through this process the author obtained rich qualitative data to answer the research questions. However, the authors account does not detail specific data analysis processes and as acknowledged by the author the use of AI is only evidenced through the use of appreciative questioning.

Cullen & Ramoutar (2003) detail an intervention carried out by two EPs, which adopted a range of theoretical models including AI, to support a school with a particularly challenging year four class. The focus of the intervention was to increase on-task and pro-social behaviour, to develop and improve classroom management structures, and to raise levels of positive communication between home and school. An appreciative inquiry 'style' interview was used by the EP to interview the Headteacher, the SENCo and the class teacher to identify positive aspects of the class; these interviews took place with the pupils from the class present and children were asked to identify the things they liked hearing the most. Six of the children's responses were written on sugar paper and discussed further in a small group activity, facilitated by an adult, and from this class behaviour targets were formed. A second session was organised by the class teacher where children were encouraged to reflect on the initial session, the targets set, and any actions they had taken. Parents were also interviewed as part of this process. At follow up it was reported there had been a reduction in concerns and the class were perceived in a more positive way, teachers felt more effective, there was greater morale and fewer tensions. Parents also felt much more positive and the children recognised changes in their behaviours. There was no formal evaluation of the use of AI as a number of theoretical approaches were used, however, it was acknowledged that AI was helpful in developing positivity and hope. Whilst AI was used to inform the interview process, the planning and implementation of the research, this study does not strictly follow the 4-D cycle, as for example no provocative propositions were made.



Doveston & Keenaghan, (2006a, 2006b) report two studies where AI has been used to inform a project entitled 'growing talent for inclusion', working with primary and secondary settings to develop classroom dynamics and social relationships. These projects used affirmative questioning to explore social dynamics whilst identifying the capacity for growth and development aligned with the 4-D cycle. The discovery phase was achieved through consultations and affirmative questioning with class teachers, observations, sociometry activities and talent spotting with children. The dream phase involved further exploration with the teacher through the miracle question and interviews with students; the first part of this stage involved the students and teacher sharing information and envisaging the future together. In the design stage, the teacher conveys her problem to her students, which in this instance is the reluctance of the children to work together, and then asks the students to help her, making them part of the solution rather than the problem. Provocative propositions were developed based on the attributes staff wanted to encourage and the students were invited to work together on developing their talents; this was achieved through a number of multisensory sessions lasting between 6 to 8 months. Feedback from staff and students was positive and small steps of progress were recognised and this model appears valid and reliable across a variety of age groups. Whilst this project is an interesting example of the application of AI, in practical terms, the time requirements make the workability of this project limited.

Willoughby & Tosey (2007) used AI as the framework for research with an English secondary school which involved students, staff, and governors. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the school experience of pupils to inform strategic planning. Initially a core group of 12 students, a boy and girl from each year group, and four members of staff worked together on the planning and implementation of the project. 240 students and 35 staff members were trained in AI and assumed the role of interviewer; this was completed during a 90 minute training session. Interviewers were then asked to complete four or five interviews to collate data for a workshop. This workshop was attended by all interviewers and aimed to discover the key themes contributing to the best experiences of school before moving on to the dream phase and exploring

visions for the future; provocative propositions were also developed. The design phase involved shorter sessions of 2.5 hours which were attended by 45 students and staff members and were structured around actions to facilitate dreams and to inform strategic planning and delivery. This study details a whole school experience of AI as even those pupils who were not involved in the main project formed smaller groups and their ideas were fed into the main workshop; findings were also reported to school governors. Participant evaluations indicated the project had been inspirational and created a positive environment, there was an energy and enthusiasm which led to the generation of 'good ideas' and participants emphasised the strengths of a collaborative approach. It also enabled the identification of issues unique to the school's culture. The project detailed here demonstrates the strengths of the AI approach and the potential for informing school development. The 4-D process was closely adhered to, and the study generated a genuine commitment to change at the whole school level. The only criticism would be that the project evaluation was based solely on staff comments and no evaluation was conducted with the young people who participated.

The final example of AI with children to summarise is that of Shuayb, Sharp, Judkins, & Hetherington (2009) who trained young people in year seven through to year 11 attending schools in south-east England, to conduct appreciative interviews to explore community cohesion. Young people attended a training workshop, took part in data analysis, and presented findings to representatives of the LA. AI interview schedules were developed, one for interviewing young people and one for interviewing school staff; each young person was asked to conduct an AI interview with another child and some children volunteered to interview school staff. In total 44 young people and four members of school staff were interviewed. The design and destiny stages were achieved through workshops where interview data was analysed and young people presented their plans to develop cohesion, to LA representatives. In the evaluation stages it was noted that recommendations were not always implemented and this was attributed to conflicting priorities within the LA. However all young children reported they enjoyed the experience, young people understood the AI concept, and they were seen as

confident and enthusiastic researchers. Some difficulties were experienced by young people such as keeping interviews focused on positive experiences and generic methodological difficulties were reported including note-taking, technical difficulties, nervousness, time restrictions, conflicts of interviewing friends, and confidence in probing responses. This study does however illustrate the potential for using AI with young people.

### **3.6.8. SUMMARY OF AI AND EDUCATION**

This literature synthesis demonstrates the applicability of AI within the field of education, as a tool for research within kindergarten settings, professional development, project evaluation, and, the AI principles have informed classroom pedagogy. AI has also been advocated as an approach which enables engagement with vulnerable and marginalised members of society in a positive manner.

Internationally, there were only three cases where AI had been used to promote outcomes for at-risk pupils and a further seven studies were found which detailed the use of AI with children; these studies ranged from evaluations of circle of friends interventions, to evaluations of perceptions of reading, to improving classroom dynamics and social relationships, and increasing on-task and pro-social behaviour. The role of children has varied from participants to active researchers.

Within the studies detailed above, the following conclusions can be drawn. AI appears to be useful methodology for obtaining rich, organisationally specific data to inform change, however there is limited empirical evaluations of the AI process as most often the focus is on research outcomes. Research has demonstrated the gains for staff working with vulnerable and marginalised pupils, however this has failed to utilise the voice of the child, despite the recognition that children are able to make a valuable contributions to inform service reform. There is a clear gap here in the AI literature. The final section of this chapter will now consider the methodological critiques of AI.

### 3.7. METHODOLOGICAL CRITIQUES

Whilst reviewing the literature of AI a number of methodological critiques have been reported which warrant further consideration. Holistically, there has been a dearth of published research which critically examines the AI approach (Bushe and Kassam, 2005) and as a research methodology it is one where there is little evidence of critical evaluation or self reflection (Grant & Humphries, 2006). In many respects AI is still in its early stages of implementation, particularly within the field of education, and further application across a range of professional domains is needed to identify those situations which may limit its use (Smart & Mann, 2003).

The positive impacts of AI have been detailed in earlier section (see section 3.4). AI is advocated as a transformational methodology across a variety of contexts, particularly in organisational change and change management (Carter, et al., 2006). This has been attributed to the positive reframing, the affirmative focus, collaborative visions for the future (Kobayashi, 2005) and the involvement of all stakeholders (Christie, 2006). However, in order to evaluate outcomes, Bushe and Kassam (2005) reviewed twenty cases which had used AI to ascertain if any transformational change occurred; this is defined as changes in the identity of a system and qualitative changes in the state of being. This review also considered how closely each research project followed the 4-D cycle and how the project adhered to the principles advocated. Of the 20 cases reviewed, prior to 2002, they concluded that only 35% of cases indicated transformational change. The other 65% of studies were perceived to be successful action research based approaches to organisational development with a focus on inquiring into the positive. Only seven cases provided new knowledge despite providing a new lens.

In comparison, Baker and Wright (2005) followed up participants two years after they had participated in AI interviews. Whilst some participants reported no long term benefits having participated in AI interviews, it was reported participants felt valued and important, it reaffirmed their reason for working within the profession, there were improved relationships and communication, and participants valued the opportunity for reflection.

However, this research utilised the AI interview during the initial two stages of the AI cycle only, so this evaluation is effectively exploring just the first two stages rather than the whole of the 4-D cycle.

In more general terms, Carter et al., (2006) raised reservations concerning the use of 'evangelical', 'new age', terminology such as destiny, dreaming and miracles, arguing this was more suitable within the world of business than in the health arena and that this may compromise the perceived scientific rigour of the approach. However within the world of psychology we are perhaps more comfortable with such language due to the popularity of solution focused approaches and positive psychology.

Challenges have also been made concerning the way in which AI is introduced to participation. In some instances there have been discussions regarding the rationale for data collection rather than a formal discussion of the principles underpinning AI (Smart and Mann, 2003). Others have opened with an introduction to AI and why it is appropriate for the research at hand as it is recognised that describing all of the underlying principles may act as a barrier to the research process and there are benefits to just letting participants experience AI rather than getting stuck prematurely discussing the rationale behind AI (Christie, 2006).

There is a concern that less thoughtful and knowledgeable practitioners may begin collecting positive stories, which in themselves can be transformational, yet fail to address the remaining stages of the 4-D cycle (Bushe and Kassam, 2005). Whilst some studies have focused predominantly on the efficacy of an AI approach to interviewing, this is only one part of the process. Although there may be limitations in terms of time and other logistical constraints researchers should journey through the full 4-D cycle to be true to the AI approach. It has also been argued that the AI cycle can occur through a simple conversation between colleagues, or, as a complex, organisation wide, process involving every stakeholder (Espinosa, et al., 2002). This arguably may be an over simplified statement, underestimating the processes involved in the 4-D cycle. Finding the best of what is within an organisation requires a

high degree of effort, as people are more used to and comfortable with talking about problems and deficits; when asking questions about such positive experiences researchers have reported being met by silence suggesting this can be a real challenge (Espinosa et al., 2002). However, the benefit of adopting a ‘conversational’ approach like AI is that no special skills or technical language are required; the AI researcher’s role is to facilitate the change process, rather than being an ‘expert’ (Baker and Wright, 2005).

It is also important to acknowledge the concern that AI is an approach which solely focuses on the positive and that problems or concerns are overlooked and it is argued AI will not replace traditional problem solving models; it should be seen as complimentary to other research methodologies to encourage researchers to look for new areas of best practice (Espinosa et al., 2002). However, others advocate that AI can still acknowledge problems or negativity; it is the manner in which this is done which is different (Smart & Mann, 2003). Carter et al., (2006) advocates that to be an AI researcher one has to ‘search diligently’ for the best of what is within the setting and not ignore the worst.

### **3.8. SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW**

LAC have been identified as the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our education system (section 2.1). Children in care are more likely to be permanently excluded from school, they are more likely to have special educational needs, and whilst some achieve well, average attainment scores are lower than those achieved by their peers (DFES, 2004b). This has been attributed to a range of factors, for example: the child’s pre-care experience, instability of care placements, low adult expectations, difficulties in accessing services, and transient patterns of school attendance (2.4.2) (DFES, 2004c, 2006a, 2006b). These difficulties have a considerable impact on the child engagement with education and with longer term outcomes (section 2.4 and 2.5). As corporate parents we have a responsibility to promote positive outcomes for all children including those in our care. Research into children at risk has historically focused on deficit models and only recently attention has been paid to identifying those factors which facilitate educational success (section 2.4.3).

The government has placed increasing emphasis on the need to build services around the child, and, it is imperative we obtain the voice of the child to inform service development (section 2.6.1). Education is no exception and children should be involved in all elements of the decision-making process; it is important we listen to the voice of the child to explore how we can improve the school experience and that we act on our findings.

As EPs we have a responsibility to work creatively with LAC and to promote positive outcomes this includes bringing in new and big ideas in psychology (section 2.8), such as AI. AI is challenging traditional problem-solving approaches with its strongly affirmative focus and an appreciative lens; this methodology gives us the opportunity to explore the best of what is already happening in school settings and then consider how we can build on these existing strengths and successes. AI promotes organisational change through understanding the reality of the organisation by engaging all key stakeholders in dialogue, rather than trying to define universal truths. AI is an individualised approach, which follows the 4-D cycle: discovery, dream, design and destiny (section 3.2).

A review of the literature in this area suggests AI approach has great potential for creating change within organisations, of generating innovative, ways of co-operative working, whilst creating energy, commitment, and motivation for change. The focus on positive experiences enhances the participants' energy for change by focusing on what gives life to an organisation, what the most positive attributes are, and, through envisaging the future. Based on a range of key principles and assumptions, AI eliminates the cynicism of traditional problem solving approaches. Reports also suggest AI is a method which is interesting and stimulating, participants feel valued, good quality data is obtained, and subsequently a range of positive outcomes have been identified such as improved relationships and better communication within the organisation (section 3.4).

There are however limited applications of the approach within education and school based settings, particularly with children as key stakeholders (section

3.6) and there is a clear gap in the literature. Given the potential of AI, it is interesting to consider how effective AI could be in promoting change for more vulnerable children, such as LAC, where problems have become more entrenched. AI has limited application with at-risk pupils however benefits of employing this methodology have been reported (section 3.6.6.). Much of the research with vulnerable children has emanated from a deficit perspective and AI potentially provides a new lens for a historically problematic area.

The research project therefore purports to address the following questions:

1. Through the use of appreciative inquiry, what factors are identified within the chosen secondary school, as having the greatest positive impact on the school experience of looked after children?
2. Is appreciative inquiry a valuable and effective research tool for working with looked after children?
3. Is appreciative inquiry a valuable and effective research tool for working with school staff?
4. How likely is AI to be effective, within the chosen secondary school, in creating change?



## **CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1. INTRODUCTION**

This thesis purports to explore the ways in which we can improve the school experience for LAC in secondary schools, using AI. AI has been applied within a variety of contexts, however, there are limited applications in the field of education with groups of vulnerable children. There is no published research that uses AI with LAC or those professionals who work with them. This thesis therefore provides an opportunity to explore whether AI is effective for working with LAC and school staff, whether AI is likely to create change within the secondary school, and, whether AI can generate a new perspective on a historically problematic area.

### **4.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

As a result of the literature review the following research questions will be addressed:

1. Through the use of appreciative inquiry, what factors are identified within the chosen secondary school, as having the greatest positive impact on the school experience of looked after children?
2. Is appreciative inquiry a valuable and effective research tool for working with looked after children?
3. Is appreciative inquiry a valuable and effective research tool for working with school staff?
4. How likely is AI to be effective, within the chosen secondary school, in creating change?

### **4.3. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

AI is a qualitative research approach; this method of data gathering generates rich data where the researcher is looking for meaning, understanding and interpretation (Larkin, 2004). Qualitative approaches do not aim to quantify

data, instead, they are concerned with seeking knowledge through descriptive discourse (Kvale, 2007). Within social research it is recognised that qualitative approaches provide a unique opportunity to understand people, their thoughts, and their ways of being, which is not provided through quantitative approaches and numerical data (Robson, 2007).

Lyons (2000) also identified a range of factors which can raise the credibility of qualitative findings which are detailed below. The most pertinent include: a) keeping analysis and conclusion close to the data source, b) keeping documentation to reflect decisions made through data collection and analysis (to enhance the validity of the approach), c) detail a transparent process of analysis, d) reflection on and explicit discussion of the impact of our own beliefs and values throughout the process, and, e) triangulation of data source and methodological tools. These processes were used to inform the planning of this research.

#### **4.4. CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY**

Case study methodology is:

*‘an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context’ (Yin, 2009, p.18).*

Case study research enables the intensive investigation of a single case, whether this be a person, an event, a group, or an organisation (Elmes, et al., 1995). In determining if case study methodology is the most suitable approach, Yin (2009) argues this is dependent upon the nature of the research questions, the extent of control the researcher has, and the degree the research focuses on contemporary events. Given the research questions proposed here, the lack of control required by the researcher, and the clearly contemporary focus, case study methodology appears most appropriate for this research. The use of using case study methodology is also advocated within the AI framework as each organisation is explored in its own right. For the purposes of this research a single case study design will be employed, the

'case' for exploration will be a LA secondary school and within this the voice of LAC and school staff will be sought.

There are a number of advantages associated with case study methodology. Case study research provides an opportunity to explore important factors in the functioning of an organisation and to explore how these factors fit together in a real context (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). The use of case study methodology can heighten ecological validity as it is not artificial in the ways some contrasting approaches can be; it allows the researcher to pay attention to the context of the organisation which is not considered to the same degree in more fixed, experimental, designs (Robson, 2007). This enables the researcher to capture the complexities of an organisation, to explore relationships, and processes (Robson, 2007), with due regard for the uniqueness, specificity, and contextual issues of each social phenomena (Ragin, 2009). This can yield a great amount of descriptive data (Elmes, et al., 1995), which is most commonly achieved through interviews and observations (Robson, 2007). Whilst case orientated work has increased in popularity, it has been subject to vigorous criticism regarding its scientific credibility, challenged on both methodological and epistemological grounds (Harvey, 2009).

#### **4.4.1. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF THE CASE STUDY**

Before exploring the reliability and validity of the case study approach it is important to define these key terms. These definitions presented here will be referred to throughout the course of this thesis. All research aims to be both reliable and valid. In general terms reliability is defined as:

*'a synonym for dependability, consistency and replicability over time, over instruments and over groups of respondents'* (Cohen et al., 2000, p.147).

This definition is adapted within the context of qualitative research and is argued that qualitative approaches should be evaluated by its credibility, dependability, replicability, transferability and applicability (Gomm, 2009).

Validity is defined as a requirement for both quantitative and qualitative research and in its simplest form refers to:

*'a particular instrument which measures what it purports to measure'*  
(Cohen et al., 2000, p.133).

It is recognised that validity is a more complex and multi-factorial construct and should in fact be conceptualised as a degree of validity rather than an absolute state; researchers should 'strive to minimise invalidity and maximise validity' (Cohen, et al., 2000, p132).

In terms of case study methodology and the concept of reliability, Mjoset (2009) advocates that a case can not necessarily be replicated at any time, by anyone, especially in those cases where the context is central; this context may not occur again and we cannot 'build' context. Case study methodology therefore does not allow researchers to draw firm inferences and there is a limited ability to generalise, predominantly due to the limited sample size (Mjoset, 2009). Byrne (2009) identifies that within case-based methods there is a difference between generalising and universalising; generalising allows the author to draw from specific cases having studied an organisation in depth and in detail, to achieve a unique understanding, rather than creating a universal truth. The data generated can enable the researcher to make comparisons with similar organisations (Elmes, et al., 1995) and it is possible to achieve naturalistic generalisation where the readers of research are able to relate the findings to their own experiences, which will develop empathy and understanding (Gomm, 2009). Yin (2009) further defines the differences between statistical generalisation and analytical generalisation; in the later the researcher is striving to generalise their findings to a broader theory.

Caution has been raised concerning the risk of the researcher to 'homogenise social phenomena' in a way that challenges the uniqueness of settings and the integrity of the research (Ragin, 2009); this research methodology strongly supports this view and advocates the importance of the unique context. For that reason, this research is focused upon analytical and naturalistic

generalisation, informing the development of a theory at a case level (Mjoset, 2009) which in turn, facilitates an understanding of other cases or situations (Robson, 2002). This research aims to discover the truth within a single organisation and it is envisaged the key variables identified, which have the greatest positive impact on the school experience of LAC, can be generalised to similar school settings. Even though the data is based on a small number of interviews, this provides an illustrative perspective, as it is based on real life experiences (Gillham, 2000). Similarly, findings regarding AI methodology can be generalised to other applications within the field.

In order to make a case study more robust, it is essential that information is gathered from a range of sources (Robson, 2007); and triangulation of methods should be used to overcome the identified weaknesses of case study methodology (Mjoset, 2009). Triangulation is a method of cross-checking one source of evidence against another (Gomm, 2009), allowing access to a broader range of data and enabling the development of converging lines of inquiry, which is likely to make findings more convincing and accurate (Yin, 2009). This research will therefore adopt data triangulation regarding key interview themes, and, methodological triangulation concerning the efficacy of AI.

#### **4.5. ACTION RESEARCH**

AI is conceptualised as a model of action research (Carter, et al., 2006) which is gaining in popularity and credibility (Dick, 2004). Based on the early work of Lewin (1946) action research is designed to generate knowledge of social systems whilst attempting to encourage change at the same time; the fundamental principles of AI.

Action research is defined as an approach which:

*‘...integrates research and action in a series of flexible cycles involving holistically rather than separate steps; the collection of data; the planning and introduction of action strategies to bring about positive changes; and evaluation of those changes through further data*

*collection, analysis and interpretation... and so forth.'* (Somekh, 2006, p.6)

Action research involves the researcher being in a situation with a view to improving it, with direct participation of individuals the research is focused upon (Robson, 2007). Action research aims to create an improvement, innovation, change, or development in practice; it also aims to enhance the practitioners understanding achieved through critical collaborative inquiry, reflection, accountability, self-evaluation and participation (Zuber-Skerritt, 2003). Action research is cyclical with a focus on planning a change, exploring what happens after that change, reflecting, and planning further action where later steps are dependent on outcomes (Robson, 2007). To qualify as action research this must involve both action and evaluation separately but simultaneously (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, & Tindall, 1994). It is a way of analysing professional practice through a continuously developing sequence of reflection and changes (Zuber-Skerritt, 2003).

Robson (2007) identified in order for action research to be effective, the involvement of the researcher should be seen as integral and should not become a confounding variable; this is achieved in part through good social and organisational skills. Within action research it is important to consider the strong emphasis on collaboration and how this can have implications on time and project completion, moving beyond the control of the researcher; such active cooperation can be difficult to achieve as the research takes place in the work setting where there are many conflicting demands. Additionally, action research is only successful when all team members have ownership for the defined problem and they are interested in solving it, if they voluntarily become involved, and if they are open to change, review and reflection (Zuber-Skerritt, 2003).

The strength of action research is the focus on precise knowledge that is applied to a specific problem in a specific setting; it offers rigour, authenticity and an organisational voice (Cohen, et al., 2000), it also ensures the well-being of participants (Stringer, 1999) and it is a popular and effective

approach in the field of education (Herr & Anderson, 2005). AI can however be compromised by unclear and restricted communication which can be evident within hierarchical organisations such as schools (Cohen, et al., 2000) and there can also be a lack of resources and support within the organisation (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2010). Whilst this review of action research is not extensive by any means, it reinforces that AI is open to the same principles, strengths, and limitations as action research.

#### **4.6. EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS:**

Epistemology is defined as:

*‘The theory of knowledge, especially the enquiry into what is to count as knowledge, the validity of knowledge, what distinguishes mere belief from knowledge, what kinds of things are knowledgeable, and whether anything can be known for certain’ (Colman, 2006, p.256).*

The concept of epistemology creates links between methodology and practice. The epistemological stance carries a number of assumptions about the nature of data and how participants perceive their world and their reality.

AI is grounded on five key principles, making AI unique and powerful (Carter, et al., 2006), these are defined in table 3.1 overleaf. AI is conceptualised as an approach which is based upon constructionist, anticipatory (see section 3.3), simultaneity, poetic, and positive principles. Cooperrider and Whitney (2007) argue that as AI is embedded in a number of principles it is able to challenge traditional action research approach.

	PRINCIPLE	MEANING
1	The constructionist principle	Knowledge and destiny are interwoven concepts; leaders must perceive organisations as living human constructions.
2	The principle of simultaneity	The belief that inquiry is an intervention and change begins at moment the inquiry begins.
3	The poetic principle	Organisational life is expressed through the stories that are told and that these stories are continually being co-constructed. The language we use in our inquiry is as important as the outcomes we achieve.
4	The anticipatory principle	The actions we take are guided by our image of the future.
5	The positive principle	Change and motivation require the experience of positive emotions (joy, excitement, hope) and social bonding.

*Table 3.1: AI key principles (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2001; Bushe and Kassam, 2005; Fitzgerald et al., 2003)*

AI is aligned with the post-modernist perspective which advocates all versions of reality are equally valid, and there is no ‘ultimate’ truth (Gomm, 2009); as such the data gathered in this research should be respected as the reality for the participants within the organisation. Lewis, et al., (2007) identifies that the post-modernist perspective challenges conventional organisational theories as it argues knowledge is created through conversations, we construct ourselves through stories, there is no definitive history, different perspectives are inevitable and welcome, there is no one right way of doing things, everything is relational, and organisations are socially constructed images.

AI and its postmodernism underpinnings are aligned with the social constructionist perspective. Social constructionists advocate that we are constantly making sense of our world through our relationships and through our use of words, language and questions (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2007). It



advocates all knowledge is therefore socially constructed and collaborated through our interactions with others in our social, economic, and political spheres (Gomm, 2009). Social constructionism suggests we co-create the universe we experience and we are active agents and central to this philosophy is the importance of meaning, reflecting a basic human need for order, relationship and hope (Mahoney, 2002). Therefore, in order to understand organisations they should be perceived as living, dynamic, human constructions (Carter, 2006).

The literature briefly summarised here, pertaining to both the post-modernist perspective and social constructionism, has informed my views and epistemological positioning. From a personal perspective, I believe our identity is continuously being created through our experience in relationships and the meaning that we give to our experiences. There is some contradiction here as this social constructionist belief advocates that there is no truth and all versions of reality are equal, contrasting with the AI philosophy which aims to discover the 'truth' within an organisation. It is my belief that this research will appreciate the subjective reality of the participants involved, however, it is possible to define the 'organisational truth' by the commonality of themes identified; this can be defined as a judgement convergent reality conveyed through commonly articulated perspectives.

Whilst it is important to consider philosophical orientation it is also important to consider the impact of the researcher's individual approach, their intra/interpersonal skills, and their personal values in order to maintain the credibility and authenticity of the research and the framework endorsed (Carter et al., 2006). This is discussed in the following section.

#### **4.7. AXIOLOGY**

Axiology is defined as:

*'the branch of philosophy that studies judgments about values'*  
(Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009, pp., p.116)

Particularly within the field of qualitative approaches the researcher has a key role in facilitating the production of knowledge and understanding through their own perceptions (Lyons, 2000) and in order for our research to be credible we must have an awareness of how our values impact the research process (Saunders, et al., 2009). We bring our own values and opinions to our research and to minimise the impact of this researchers must work in a systematic and ethical manner (Robson, 2007). The emphasis is then on the researcher to reflect on both their actions and reactions throughout the research process (Lyons, 2000). Within this research these reflections will be encouraged through the use of a research diary, discussed in section 4.13.4.

#### **4.8. ONTOLOGY**

It is also important here to define ontology which is:

*‘the nature of being or existence or the existence of things, including the distinction between reality and appearance’ (Colman, 2006, p.527).*

This ultimately conceptualises the nature of reality and considers if there is one single reality or several realities. Within this thesis the ontological positioning is subjectivist as we are conceptualising knowledge from the realities of those who are the subjects of the study; however, it is less subjective as there are structured data gathering and intervention processes.

As researchers we must be conscious of our own values and how this may impact our approach to research and our interpretation of data. I believe that we should work from an ecological perspective and we should view child development holistically, which is reflected in the broad nature of the literature review. I also believe we should work within a socio-cultural framework, adopting a child-centred approach, where difficulties and challenges are consequences of the interactions the child has within the systems they operate as opposed to a within-child perspective. These beliefs have very much shaped the research processes utilised within this thesis and have encouraged my preference to utilise the AI approach.

Furthermore, on a personal level, during the course of this research there have been occasions where I have an increased awareness of my own values and beliefs and the possible impact this may have. For example, I felt it was important to define achievement from the perspective of participants as their definition of achievement may be different from my own personal perspective; this awareness enables the research to remain objective and reduce the likelihood of biased interpretations.

#### **4.9. POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY**

AI and its epistemological positioning also fits well within the field of positive psychology. Positive psychology is perceived to have three main strands, 1) the study of positive emotion, 2) the study of positive character traits, and, 3) the study of positive institutions (Seligman, 2003). Positive psychology is a new paradigm which challenges pathological psychology approaches and aims to inspire individuals to have a more wholesome focus on the positive aspects of life (Snyder & Lopez, 2002). We should aspire to see possibility, potential, and promise (Mahoney, 2002).

Carr (2004) suggests there are strong associations between our happiness and subjective well-being with our productivity in employment, our job satisfaction, our use of skills, and our education. Whilst strategies are suggested to enhance our happiness, for example, adaptations to our relationships, environments, and recreation, positive psychology also aims to facilitate our subjective well-being through identifying our signature strengths and virtues. Roberts, Brown, Johnson, & Reinke (2002) suggest there are benefits of adapting positive psychology approaches in our work with children, for example, to increase our understanding of child development and effective interventions which promote hope and optimism. However, it is acknowledged that greater research is required in the areas of happiness and well-being to develop our understanding of the range of experiences that influence the experience of positive emotions.

AI and positive psychology can therefore be perceived as two complimentary paradigms, where there is a clear regard for the identification of factors which contribute towards success.

#### **4.10. SAMPLING AND PARTICIPANTS**

As detailed in section 4.4 this research utilises a single case study design, focusing on one LA secondary school and aims to capture the voice of both LAC and school staff including teachers, teaching assistants, the designated LAC teacher, and senior management.

##### **4.10.1. SAMPLING**

The chosen school was identified in collaboration with the LA LAC team. Recruitment of the school had two discrete steps: 1) to identify the school with the highest number of looked after children on role, in order to minimise the risk of participant attrition and difficulties in recruitment, and 2) meeting with the identified secondary school to discuss the proposed research and ascertain their degree of interest in participating.

The initial school identified was a mixed foundation school for pupils aged 11-18 which currently has in excess of 1300 children on roll. The school is situated in the North-West of England, in a more affluent part of a largely deprived industrial town. Information from the school prospectus reports the school attracts a range of children from mixed socio-economic areas. The number of children eligible for free school meals is below average, there are few children from minority ethnic groups, whilst the number of children with complex learning needs are increasing. The school had six LAC on role at the time they were initially contacted, the highest number in any local authority secondary school.

To put this in perspective, within the LA there were 336 children and young people living in care. Care is provided by three residential homes, 172 foster carers, 42 kinship carers, and 89 outside agency placements exist.

An invitation was sent to the school's Headteacher and the designated LAC teacher to ascertain their interest in participating. A follow up phone call was made, and an initial meeting was convened to discuss the research and the requirements for participation. In this instance the meeting involved just the designated LAC teacher; however a clear interest in the research was expressed. The AI process was fully described and at this point contact details for possible participants and carers were shared. The next steps was to recruit LAC and school staff to participate in the research.

#### **4.10.2. PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT**

It is advocated that to fully understand the identified phenomenon, the social processes, and context of the organisation, a small number of participants are often selected, chosen on a theoretical basis (Lyons, 2000). In this instance the basis for recruitment was based on broad yet specific criteria to ensure that a breadth of participants were recruited.

The criterion for child participation was:

- Children must be 'looked after' by the local authority: this was not further defined i.e. duration of placement or pre-care experience.
- Children must be in attendance at the chosen secondary school and therefore in either key stage three or key stage four. Children in the sixth form provision were not approached as the focus was compulsory secondary education.
- There was no further exclusion criterion.

For school staff participation the following criterion was used:

- Staff must be currently employed within the chosen secondary school.
- Staff must have experience of working with children who are 'looked after' by the local authority, within their current job role.

- There was no further exclusion criterion.

This approach is perceived to be a stratified purposeful sampling technique, as participants recruited illustrate subgroups within the organisation, it facilitates comparison, and all cases meet some criteria (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In order to recruit LAC, an information sheet was sent to those with parental responsibility (i.e. social worker and / or carer) to obtain their consent for the participation of the LAC (see appendix 8 and 9). When consent was obtained, a letter was also sent to the child, by the researcher, giving general information regarding the research process and the proposed date and time for meeting (attached in appendix 10). In collaboration with the designated LAC teacher, times were arranged for interviews that were mutually convenient and ensured minimal disruption to the school day.

Initially six looked after children were identified who were eligible to participate in the research. Further enquiries identified that two children had recently moved out of LA care and had returned to the care of biological parents; they were no longer eligible for participation. Consent letters were sent to the social worker and carer of three other children; two consent forms were returned promptly, and the third request bore no response, despite a range of communications. Initially school were reluctant to allow the researcher to contact the sixth child as the long-term care placement had recently broken down and the child was experiencing a somewhat turbulent time. Following ongoing discussions and negotiations, the school agreed for the researcher to obtain consent for this child once settled in the new care placement, however, in this instance, the designated LAC teacher initiated contact with child's carer and social workers to obtain consent; participation was readily agreed.

Therefore, out of the four eligible children, three children participated in the research. There were two girls and one boy, one of whom was in key stage three and the other two were in key stage four. All of the children included

had been in long-term care for a period of five years or more. It is not appropriate to include any further descriptive information as this may enable the children to become identifiable.

In order to recruit staff, the designated LAC teacher was provided with information sheets and an invitation for staff to participate in a group interview and final workshop (attached in appendix 11) and staff were then approached by the designated LAC teacher. Four members of staff were recruited to the study of varying levels of seniority within the school. The participant sample comprised of the designated LAC teacher, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), a teaching assistant, and a pastoral manager. Whilst additional participants may have been advantageous it was agreed this was an appropriate cross-section of staff.

#### **4.11. THE PILOT STUDY - THE AI INTERVIEW**

Prior to detailing the methodology involved in this thesis consideration will first be paid to a pilot study conducted to inform the planning of this research. As AI methodology is a new paradigm to become acquainted with, it was proposed a pilot study should be conducted for familiarisation purposes, especially as the proposed research would involve vulnerable pupils. Pilot work presents an opportunity to test a research methodology prior to the full study (Barrett, 2000) and this small scale version presents an opportunity to check the feasibility of the research project (Robson, 2002), to test and refine data collection procedures, covering both substantive and methodological issues (Yin, 2009). This stage is perceived to be an advanced stage of interview development where the interview is conducted with an analogous population to inform last minute adjustments to the research methodology (Gillham, 2000).

In order to complete a pilot study with a somewhat analogous population AI interviews were conducted with first year students on the Doctorate of Educational and Child Psychology course at the University of Manchester. Students were invited by University teaching staff to attend a group interview which aimed to evaluate experiences of the first year of doctoral training.

This pilot provided an opportunity to clarify any methodological issues and to pilot appreciative interviewing, including the process of thematic analysis and the development of provocative propositions. This was however a time-restricted opportunity where approximately one hour had been allocated. The design and destiny stages were not piloted as this would involve a wider range of stakeholders which was beyond the scope of this research; the focus here was on data collection processes.

Whilst it is not appropriate to report the findings of the pilot study here, it is important to reflect upon this experience and detail methodological considerations which may inform the planning of this thesis. This opportunity predominantly enabled the researcher to become fully familiar with the AI process and the terminology used; interestingly, participants readily accepted the AI terminology and they were interested to learn about the AI approach. The following points were particularly pertinent:

- Although some participants initially appeared uncomfortable with the request to draw their peak experience this appeared to be an effective tool for focusing participants' attention to a specific experience and also acted as a prompt for discussion. It was felt this would be a beneficial approach, especially for child participants.
- The questions used were well understood by participants and did not require any further explanation.
- Furthermore, the quality of information generated was rich and broad. The use of open questions was central in this process, for example, the peak experiences question generated diverse responses incorporating a broad range of themes. It was also observable that the experiences recalled indicated a real sense of pride in the participants' achievements.
- Participants were eager to converse and they engaged in the AI process well. At the end of the interview participants indicated they had a high



regard for AI; however this is perhaps reflective of the participants being trainee educational psychologists.

- Within the group interview, during the first question, there was limited interaction between participants. As participants were asked to share their peak experiences with the group as a whole, it could be advantageous in future groups for participants to share their experiences in pairs, and then feed back to the group, to create a more vibrant atmosphere. When the group had a common focus, for example, discovering which seminar had been most engaging, there was greater interaction and energy between participants.
- Through the three wishes question the group cohesiveness further increased, as it was recognised that participants had a common vision for the future and were they supportive of each other's perspective and vision.
- Throughout the course of this session, the development of provocative propositions was the most challenging and participants felt they needed further support and scaffolding to complete this task. This suggests that all participants, especially LAC, will require a high level of support with this element of AI.
- The demands of the researcher during this session were somewhat high; the researcher was required to facilitate dialogue, to prompt, to summarise, and to reflect on the information generated. When the focus drifted from the affirmative there was also a need to redirect and reframe dialogue having given the participant time to voice their concerns. It was also essential to scribe during the interview and to note key areas discussed to inform the thematic analysis and development of provocative propositions. In future, during group interviews, it may be useful to have a co-researcher to fulfil the scribing role and this warrants further consideration.

- As a final point, logistically, it was recognised that the time frame was too constrictive and towards the end of the session activities felt rushed which may have compromised the development of provocative propositions. For further group sessions, additional time must be allocated for this process.

#### **4.11.1. SUMMARY OF THE PILOT STUDY**

This pilot study has generated a number of considerations to inform the planning of the current thesis, pertaining to the questions used, group dynamics, researcher demands, methodological challenges, and time demands. The following sections will now detail each stage of research and the methodological tools employed.

#### **4.12. OUTLINE OF THE STAGES OF RESEARCH - APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY**

As detailed in the literature review AI is a systematic and practical framework following the 4-D cycle; this approach shapes the whole of the research process, from its methodological design, to the questions used, the data analysis methods, and the feedback given (Fitzgerald, et al., 2003). This section further explores each AI stage of the 4-D cycle and describes the methodological tools used within the current study.

Although AI in its application is not prescriptive, whilst reviewing the literature it was evident there is a commonality of methods used. For purposes of clarification this is summarised in table 4.1 overleaf and these findings were used to inform the planning of this thesis.

PHASE	METHODOLOGY
DISCOVER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews: small group and / or focus groups</li> <li>• Story telling of peak experiences and values</li> <li>• Identification of themes</li> </ul>
DREAM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miracle questions</li> <li>• Preferred scenarios</li> </ul>
DESIGN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing and validating provocative propositions</li> <li>• Creating action around the possibilities</li> </ul>
DESTINY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group sign up to action</li> <li>• Contributions to policy formation</li> <li>• Policy development subgroups</li> </ul>

*Table 4.1: AI stages and common methodology*

#### 4.12.1. DEFINE

Whilst the commonly accepted model of AI has four distinct phases, there are suggestions that defining the topic of inquiry is a crucial element in the research cycle and should be the primary stage. Here the subject matter should be collaboratively agreed and structured (Fitzgerald et al., 2003; Bushe and Kassam, 2005) and it is important the topic area is clearly focused and defined as this forms the basis for question construction (Hammond, 1998).

In order to define the area for inquiry a meeting was arranged with the LA LAC team to identify a specific research focus. During this meeting a range of concerns were raised by LA officers, which included concerns regarding the persistent academic underachievement of LAC in secondary schools. Through ongoing negotiations it was agreed this research would focus on the ways in which we can optimise the school experience for LAC and subsequently create the most productive school climate for learning.

Further to this initial define stage, given the strong emphasis on academic achievement, prior to starting each interview participants were also asked to

define achievement from their perspective to further define the broader area of inquiry.

#### **4.12.2. DISCOVER**

The initial discovery stage is focused around the identification of the sources that give life to the organisation, through reflecting on peak experiences alongside personal and organisational values.

This typically involves interviews, either within a group setting, on a 1:1 basis with a researcher or facilitator, or, with participants interviewing each other. It is worth noting that asking participants to become interviewers reportedly can cause some anxieties, especially with the somewhat unconventional affirmative focus (Reed, Pearson, Douglas, Swinburne, & Wilding, 2002). Whilst it was recognised in the pilot study participants interviewing each other may have been beneficial, given the vulnerability of LAC and the potential for sharing sensitive information, the interviews were conducted by the EP.

Cooperrider & Whitney (2007) and Christie (2006) provide further details regarding the structure of the AI interview. The first question encourages storytelling to explore peak experiences, conveying a time when the participant perceived their work within the organisation to be at its best. The participant is then asked about those occasions when their organisation has felt most successful, energised, and excited, and what factors contributed to this. Additional questions are then based around participant values, exploring what the participant values most about the topic of inquiry and what personal values they bring to the organisation or group.

In order to achieve this stage, participants were invited to attend a semi-structured interview. Based on the principles detailed above, the first part of the interview focused on discovering the 'the best of what is' and questions were adapted from the classic AI questions proposed by Hammond (1998, see section 4.13.1). The first two questions are the main prompts for the discovery phase and these focus on the exploration of peak experiences and values. An interview schedule was devised for LAC (appendix 2) and for school

staff (appendix 3). LAC were interviewed on a one-to-one basis and were asked to draw their peak experience given the success of this within the pilot group. Whilst it was hoped that staff would be interviewed in a focus group, this was not possible due to timetabling issues and logistical constraints within the school. Two staff members participated in individual interviews and two further staff members participated in a small group interview.

#### **4.12.3. DREAM**

The dream stage purports to connect the future with the past, creating a vision and dreaming of what would be different if the organisation was working at its best at all times. Typically, this stage is informed by the use of the miracle question or the three wishes question (Christie, 2006). In accordance with this, during the semi-structure interviews participants were asked to identify three wishes to envisage how we could improve the school experience for LAC.

#### **4.12.4. DESIGN**

The design stage bridges the discover and dream stages through envisaging a clear and compelling vision of how things will be, describing the ideal, and putting visions into words and actions, through the development of 'provocative propositions' or 'mission statements' (van Vuuren & Crous, 2005). This stage intends to design a future drawing upon and magnifying the positive core of the organisation to realise newly expressed dreams (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2007).

In order to create provocative propositions key themes within the interview data must be identified in accordance with thematic analysis literature (section 4.13.3). Based on the themes identified statements are composed which symbolise where the organisations wants to be, based on the high moments of where they have been; in doing so they provide a reminder to the group of the peak experiences that participants have had (Hammond, 1998). These statements should be written in the affirmative and present tense and should ultimately describe the organisation at its best (Christie, 2006). In

writing provocative propositions, Hammond (1998, p.44) encourages the researcher to check propositions against the following criteria:

- Is it provocative? Does it stretch, challenge or innovate?
- Is it grounded in examples?
- Is it what we want? Will people defend it or get passionate about it?
- Is it stated in affirmative, bold terms and in present tense (as if it were already happening?)

In light of the above, following the dream phase of the semi-structured interview, the researcher and participant(s), collaboratively identified the key themes which has arisen during the course of the interview and the researcher made field notes during each interview to facilitate this process. Based on the themes identified a range of provocative propositions were constructed, reflecting the breadth of information shared.

With LAC, themes were written on a sheet of paper during the interview and provocative propositions were co-constructed based on this data. This was a highly structured, collaborative, and supportive process, as it was recognised during the pilot study this was likely to be an area of difficulty. Whilst these tasks were largely directed by the researcher, the collaborative element enabled member checking to ensure the validity and reliability of themes derived. In comparison, with school staff the researcher had to take more responsibility for this than hoped as there was no time available to complete tasks collaboratively. Again, during the interview themes were written on a sheet of paper and these were summarised at the end of the interview to check for accuracy. Based on this data provocative propositions were composed by the researcher and emailed to participant(s), along with the identified themes, for further validation and to ensure they were an accurate reflection of participant views. Participants were encouraged to develop their own propositions or modify those suggested.

#### **4.12.5. DESTINY**

As reflected in the literature review there are limited descriptive reports concerning the implementation of the destiny stage. The essence of this final

stage is to create plans and processes that encourage and nurture actions initiated by participants; this requires a commitment from stakeholders to empower, adjust, and create change. Actions here strengthen the affirmative capabilities of the whole organisation whilst building hope and momentum for change (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2007).

For the purpose of this study a 'destiny workshop' was planned. In preparation for this, themes from each interview were triangulated and grouped to create a comprehensive list of themes representative of all participants. Provocative propositions were also amalgamated into a group list, based on the individual provocative propositions created. The proposed agenda for the workshop was structured around sharing the group themes and provocative propositions followed by a workshop session where all participants collaboratively identified actions and momentum for change.

Although this was an open invitation to all participants, the designated LAC teacher chose to attend this workshop alone and agreed to further cascade findings and actions through school briefings and liaison with staff. In accordance with the agenda, each of the themes and provocative propositions were presented, which created further dialogue and validation that each theme was an accurate reflection of the school's practice. During this process, discussion naturally emanated regarding the manner in which propositions could be achieved or developed where satisfactory measures were already in place. Field notes were made to record agreed actions and these were summarised for accuracy during the course of the workshop. It was agreed that a report of findings and actions would be provided to the designated LAC teacher at the earliest opportunity and copied to the LA LAC team; as an interim measure a copy of the field notes was provided.

#### **4.12.6. SUMMARY**

The research methodology was planned in accordance with the AI 4-D research cycle. Two additional stages were added to the 4-D cycle which provided an opportunity for participants to evaluate their experiences of AI; the

methodology for this is discussed in the following sections. Figure 2.2 overleaf summarises the research process:



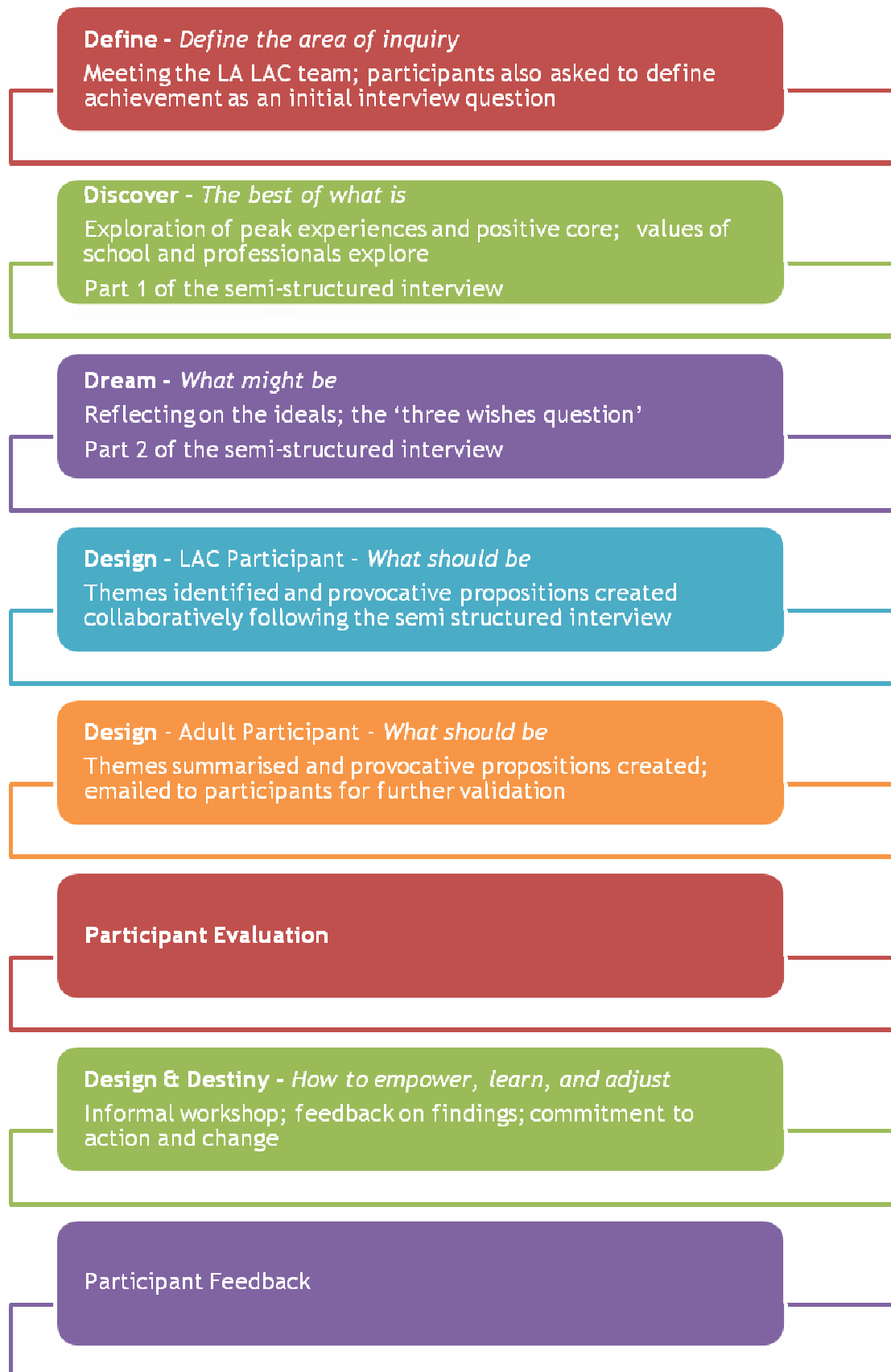


Figure 2.2. Summary of the AI research process

#### **4.13. DATA COLLECTION**

A number of data collection methods were used during the course of this research; in the following section each method will be defined with particular consideration paid to methodological strengths, limitations, reliability and validity.

##### **4.13.1. THE RESEARCH INTERVIEW**

In accordance with the discovery and dream phases of the 4-D cycle a semi-structured interview was designed; a version was created for LAC and another version for school staff. Hammond (1998) proposed a set of classic AI questions for the discovery and dream stages detailed below:

1. Think back through your career in this organisation. Locate a moment that was a high point, when you felt most effective and engaged. Describe how you felt and what made the situation possible.
2. Without being humble, describe what you value most about yourself, your work, your organisation?
3. Describe your three concrete wishes for the future of this organisation.

These questions were adapted for the purpose of this thesis and the interview schedule can be found in appendix 2 and appendix 3.

##### **4.13.2. INTERVIEW METHODOLOGY**

Interviews are one of the most common methods of collecting qualitative data. A number of strengths have been proposed, in particular, interviews pay due regard to the social phenomenon under investigation, allowing exploration of perceptions and meaning whilst exploring the complexities and uniqueness of our experiences; this allows the researcher to develop theories which are relevant and grounded in real data (Lyons, 2000). The purpose of the research interview is to obtain information and understanding of issues pertaining to the research aims and specific research questions (Gillham, 2000). Qualitative interviews therefore generate richer data, they do not force

participants to respond to questions of no relevance, and they allow the interviewer to treat the participant as a unique person, with the freedom to explore areas of interest as they arise (Gomm, 2009).

The essence of an interview is described by three characteristics, interviews are interactive, are in 'real time', and use natural language (Rugg & Petre, 2007). Whilst there is differentiation between interviews that are structured (utilising simple, specific, closed questions) or unstructured (using 'natural' conversation), interviewing schedules can be conceptualised as part of a continuum with semi-structured interviews falling in the middle (using a combination of open and closed questions); it is advocated that the more talented researcher always has a structure which is used flexibly in response to the dialogue emerging (Gillham, 2000). Interviews, of a semi-structured nature, are inherently flexible and versatile which gives the interviewee the opportunity to describe and discuss important issues which may not have been captured using alternative methods (Rugg & Petre, 2007).

As with all research tools there are limitations to interviews which may influence the reliability and validity of findings. Initially, within the social processes of an interview there may be elements of subject reactivity, such as passive compliance, response deviation, and social desirability (Elmes, et al., 1995). Due to the varieties of interview methods, analysis techniques, and epistemological considerations there is no general criteria for verifying the reliability and validity of the data generated (Kvale, 2007); however there are also no specific points of reference which indicate that interviews are less reliable or valid than alternative methods of data collection (Breakwell, 2000). However, threats to validity can be overcome by a range of strategies including peer debriefing and support, member checking, and triangulation (Cohen et al., 2000; Robson, 2002). Kvale (2007) also argues that validity is a construct achieved during interviews through continually checking, questioning and theoretically interpreting the findings; for example, dialogical intersubjectivity through member checking, reciprocal discourse, and open criticism between the individuals interpreting data, promotes the reliability and validity of research findings.

In light of these factors and given the collaborative element to AI, the reliability and validity of interview data will be maximised through member checking between the researcher and participants, which also reduces potential power imbalances by the relationship being one that is based on collaboration and mutual respect. Data will also be triangulated which confirms themes have been supported by more than one single source of evidence; this also improves and overcomes issues pertaining to construct validity as multiple sources of evidence provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon (Yin, 2009). Validity is further enhanced through the use of audio recordings which can be used to clarify field notes if required.

Gillham (2000) identifies challenges to interview research such as the time and costs incurred through piloting, conducting, transcribing, and analysing the research interview; factors such as interviewer anxiety, lack of confidence in interview techniques, and a failure to appreciate the active role of silence are also cited. However, these challenges can be overcome by preparation, effective planning, and practice; it is also possible to build trust and confidence in a relatively short period of time to promote an open and honest communicative forum.

In conducting effective interviews it is acknowledged that the interviewer should listen more than they speak, questions should be presented in a straightforward, clear, and non-threatening way and there should not be cues which lead participants to respond in a particular way (Robson, 2002). Interviews are most effective when the following skills are evident: careful listening, establishing rapport, further exploration of important clues, and directing conversations as appropriate (Morrison & Anders, 2001). It is also important that the interviewer is psychologically available to the participant and that they show an interest in the views being communicated, with verbal and non-verbal responses (Gillham, 2000).

Given the strengths of the semi-structured interview and the nature of AI a semi-structured interview schedule was developed which utilised open-ended questions, to give the respondent the opportunity to say as much or as little as

they wish, and, it allows a focus on personal relevance which is particularly pertinent in this case (Breakwell, 2000). Whilst it is suggested that young children respond to questions that are directive and structured (Morrison & Anders, 2001) the interview schedule will be open and non-directive; however further prompts, encouragement, and clarification will be used to facilitate responses as required. As interviews have been identified as a sensitive and powerful tool for generate rich, vivid, and interesting data, capturing the experiences of the participants from their own perspective (Kvale, 2007), it unlikely this data could be generated through alternative means, such as questionnaires or surveys.

In accordance with the processes detailed by Gillham (2000) the interview comprises of four stages: an introduction, the opening development of the interview, the central core, and closure of the interview. At the start of each interview a script was followed (appendix 4) to thank the participant for attending the meeting and to seek their verbal consent for participation. Further issues pertaining to confidentiality, anonymity, and the participants' right to withdraw were also discussed, along with explanations of the purpose of the research, the breadth of participants, and the dissemination of findings. At this point participants were informed of the AI framework. Interviews were audio-recorded after asking participants for their consent, and, it was agreed that interviews would be listened to again, transcribed and further analysed in the form of content analysis (see section 4.14.1) and transcribed.

Before entering into the interview schedule general questions were asked regarding the child's age, length of time in care, and school history; school staff were asked questions regarding the length of time they had worked in the secondary school and their experiences of working with LAC. Following the central core of the interview participants were thanked for their contributions and given the opportunity to ask any further questions. The next stage of the 4-D cycle involved thematic analysis, which is detailed in the following section, to inform the development of provocative propositions.

#### 4.13.3. THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The identification of themes within the interview data is intended to be a collaborative process between the researcher and participant, akin to the process of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis focuses on identification of themes from direct statements made (Aronson, 1994) and can be used with any form of qualitative data (Boyatzis, 1998). A theme is a common pattern found in the data, which can be manifest content i.e. it is directly observable, or, in the latent content i.e. based on the implied content of data; research should be concerned with both of these kinds of content (Joffe & Yardely, 2004).

Braun and Clarke (2006) advocate that thematic analysis is an accessible and theoretically flexible approach, which seeks to describe patterns of meaning across qualitative data sets. In line with the account provided by these authors, this analysis attempts to provide a rich description of the data to provide the reader and participant with a sense of the important issues. Furthermore, as the current research falls within a social constructionist approach (section 4.6) this analysis aims to explore events, realities, meanings and experiences focusing on sociocultural contexts and conditions rather than exploring individual motivations which other epistemological stances may strive to achieve.

Whilst the majority of the thematic analysis takes place during the interview further analysis is required in terms of data triangulation and developing a coherent set of group themes. This process is achieved through first and second level coding detailed by Miles & Huberman (1994). Data is initially coded or grouped into first-level codes following the individual interviews; this is a descriptive process whereby labels are given to groups of words or statements. This is distinguished from second-level coding which is referred to as 'pattern coding' where the initial codes are grouped, triangulated and patterns are identified.

In order to achieve this, themes were identified collaboratively at the end of each research interview (stage 1). During the research interviews bullet-point

notes were made regarding the participants response, on a sheet of A3 paper. At the end of the interview these bullet-points were fed back to the participant and then grouped into themes. At the end of the research process, having conducted six interviews, there were six A3 sheets which summarised the interview content and the key themes identified. The themes identified were then triangulated into a coherent list of group themes (stage 2); to ensure they were valid and reliable, and, representative of all participants.

#### **4.13.4. RESEARCH DIARY**

It was proposed that for the duration of the thesis a research diary would be kept, to encourage self-reflection and to provide additional data in relation to the proposed research questions; as these questions are centred on the efficacy of AI, researcher reflections can be further triangulated with participant evaluations. Research diaries are a key tool, which enable the researcher to critically evaluate progress, feelings, thoughts, insecurities and insights; they develop ideas and fluency, encourage reflexivity, and enable the researcher to map complex structures and relationships (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2006). Diaries are introspective in their nature and can lead to important insights (Altrichter & Holly, 2005). The notion of reflexivity is a particularly important concept within qualitative research as the research process is subject to a variety of influences and it is important that we identify and understand how this may impact upon our interpretations; a research diary therefore provides an effective mechanism for allowing space, time, and a context for reflection (Nadin & Cassell, 2006).

The use of a research diary can also supplement the information generated from alternative methods of data collection, as it provides an opportunity to collate information regarding the researcher, actions taken, and the research process (Hughes, 2000) providing a rich narrative account (Gomm, 2009). Research diaries reflect a seamless web of ideas which reflect the development of thinking, implying an open-minded and critical approach (Silverman, 2005). This appeared to be a good measure for further considering the efficacy of the AI approach.

Entries were organised chronologically and efforts were made to separate descriptive elements and interpretive elements as suggested by Altrichter & Holly (2005), to ensure accuracy at the analysis stage. In line with the model proposed by Nadin & Cassell (2006) an entry was made into the research diary immediately after each visit. This included both practical and methodological information regarding meetings that had taken place, and, personal reflections of the experience. Throughout the research process, the diary was also used as a mechanism for recording thought development and reflections which were not related to direct contact; as the research process is continually evolving this mechanism was useful for collating these thoughts. It is recognised that the research diary should represent a collection of ideas as they occur to the researcher (Hughes, 2000). Due to the spontaneous nature of thought development some entries were recorded as voice memos and later transcribed into the diary. It is also important to emphasise that the diary was stored confidentially at all times.

At the end of the research project, the research diary was read fully. As with all qualitative approaches the data collected was also eligible for qualitative analysis (Altrichter & Holly, 2005); the research diary was analysed for common themes in line with the thematic analysis approach (defined in section 4.13.3). The themes identified were discussed with during peer supervision for validity purposes.

#### **4.13.5. EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRES**

At the end of each AI interview participants were asked to evaluate their experience of AI through a questionnaire (see appendix 6 and 7) to explore the efficacy of AI.

Questionnaire methodology provides an opportunity to collect useful and accurate information about subjective features in a standardised format (Rugg & Petre, 2007). Questionnaires can be simplistic, versatile, and can generate good quality information to test hypotheses (Fife-Shaw, 2000); they may comprise of checklists, attitude scales, projective techniques, rating scales and questions may be open-ended, pre-coded or more rigidly constructed



(Oppenheim, 1992). Standard open-ended questionnaires enable comparability, facilitates organisation and facilitation of data collection, and enables participants to raise pertinent issues (Cohen, et al., 2000). Wilkinson & Birmingham (2003) do highlight limitations to questionnaire methodology which warrant consideration; this includes the use of leading, complicated, and ambiguous questions, the associated time requirements, and the lack of personal contact; the latter is not a concern within the current research as this questionnaire will be given following the research interview. Oppenheim (1992) suggests that participants are more likely to complete questionnaires if they are given advanced warning, if they are assured regarding confidentiality and anonymity, and if it has a pleasing appearance, length, and ease of return; all of which is facilitated by good rapport between the interviewer and the participant.

The questionnaire was designed in line with the proposed research questions and also aimed to explore the criticisms of AI identified in the literature (section 3.7). The questionnaire includes open-ended questions and simple rating scales. Findings from the questionnaire will be presented verbatim and will not be subject to further analysis. The composition of this questionnaire was discussed with research supervisors to ensure the questionnaire achieved what it purported to do; to further ascertain participant views of their AI experience. Based on the outcomes of these discussions the evaluation questionnaire was not piloted as it was felt that this tool was reliable for the purposes of this research. It is acknowledged that there are disadvantages to this, as piloting the questionnaire may have enabled the modification of specific elements, for example, difficult questions or the accessibility of language used. However use of the questionnaire in this thesis can provide pilot evidence for further research.

#### **4.14. DATA ANALYSIS METHODS**

As discussed within the data collection phases, thematic analysis of the data took place to identify key themes generated during the AI interview, however, in order to further explore the efficacy of AI it was proposed a content

analysis would be conducted focusing on the processes of the research interview; there will not be any further analysis of the interview content.

#### **4.14.1. CONTENT ANALYSIS**

Content analysis (CA) is a methodology for classifying textual material into more manageable and relevant units of data (Weber, 1990), providing categorical data open to quantification (Breakwell, 2000). It is a systematic research method for both written and oral communications forms including a range of texts, images, media, observational records and interviews (Krippendorff & Bock, 2009).

CA is an approach which focuses on coding segments as features of interest (Gomm, 2009), to ascertain the frequency of key variables or units of analysis and it is part of a process of theory development and hypothesis testing (Wilson & Hammond, 2000). When CA is used for the identification of variables its strength is that it provides an opportunity for the researcher to stand back from the data, to impose order on a wealth of data, and, to look for variables which may have been omitted or to spot important differences between interviews (Breakwell, 2000).

It is argued this approach is somewhat reductionist, and in order to understand the richness of qualitative data the researcher should immerse themselves in data to understanding the emergent themes (Breakwell, 2000). However, the purpose of using CA in this research is to further analyse the efficacy of AI as a data collection tool. It is not necessary to further analyse the data sets in regards to the thematic content, as AI is a collaborative approach it would be inappropriate to impose themes in retrospect which have not been identified and agreed with the participant. The analysis here is more concerned with noncontent measures which include factors such as the duration of speech and interactional processes (Matarazzo & Wiens, 1972).

As the focus of analysis is the function of AI as a data collection tool, key texts were returned to which define characteristics of an effective interview

(section 4.13.2) to devise a framework for analysis. Kvale (1996, p.145) suggests a list of quality criteria for interviews, including the following:

- The extent of spontaneous, rich, specific, and relevant answers from the interviewee.
- The shorter the interviewer's questions and the longer the subjects' answers, the better.
- The degree to which the interviewer follows up and clarifies the meanings of the relevant aspects of the answers.
- The ideal interview is to a large extent interpreted throughout the interview.
- The interviewer attempts to verify his or her interpretations of the subject's answers in the course of the interview.
- The interview is "self-communicating" - it is a story contained in itself that hardly requires much extra descriptions and explanations.

Whilst this provides a useful framework for reflection, this criterion is not easily readily quantifiable or specific enough for the purpose of this analysis. Importantly, this is not an analysis of the skills of the interviewer or the content, and as the interview was not video recorded it is not possible to analyse elements of non-verbal communication.

#### **4.14.2. INTERACTIONAL PROCESS ANALYSIS**

Research dating back to the 1950's and 1960's began to scientifically investigate interview speech research, recognising analysis not only focused on content but the physical dimensions of conversations, such as tone and volume, and the paralinguistic elements of speech, such as sighs and inhalations (Matarazzo & Wiens, 1972). As CA is an adaptable methodology, the key constructs are defining units of analysis, conceptualising analytical

constructs, and developing coding categories, which allows the researcher to answer specific questions not necessarily related to content (Krippendorff & Bock, 2009).

Matarazzo and Wiens (1972) describe their research in this area which focuses on four main aspects: the duration of utterance, interruptions, reaction time latency (the duration of silence separating one persons utterance from the next, a measure of reaction time), and, initiative time latency (the length of time between the end of the persons utterance, and that same individual contributing another utterance).

This lead to the discovery of a model of non-content analysis proposed by Bales (1950), which is a more structured form of analysis, focusing predominantly on interactions and processes within small groups, known as 'interaction process analysis'. Analysis focuses on the content of actions covering four key areas: positive reactions, attempted answers, questions, negative reactions. Each category is the further analysed by the following interactions: shows solidarity, shows tension release, agrees, gives suggestion, gives opinion, gives orientation, asks for orientation, asks for suggestion, disagrees, shows tension, shows antagonism, and not codable / other. Although this model was originally proposed as a method for observing and analysing group processes, the categories are arguably valid for many kinds of interactional analysis.

However, as the work of Bales is now over half a century old, this model has been modified by more modern researchers, in particular, within the medical profession to analyse the communicative functions and structure of doctor-patient consultations. These applications are of greater interest here as they are based on dyadic doctor-patient interactions. For example, the Roter Interaction Analysis System (Roter & Larson, 2002) was developed from Bales' model and provided a detailed classification system of all utterances occurring within a doctor-patient consultation, with the aim of evaluating communication. This contained four instrumental clusters pertaining to questioning and information sharing, and four socio-emotional factors: social

behaviour, verbal attentiveness, showing concern and negative concern. The authors summarise a range of empirical research which suggests the model is reliable and a favourable method of analysis within Europe and beyond.

The Medical Interaction Process System (Ford, Hall, Ratcliffe, & Fallowfield, 2000) has also been developed for objective analysis, teaching of communication skills, and for empirical research. Pearson correlations between the RIAS and MIPS show a good level of concurrence between the two systems. Ford et al., (2000) details this model was developed to provide a system which could highlight the complexity and diversity of information shared in consultations. This included dependant modes, such as the format of questions, checking information, giving information, and a number of independent modes such as facilitating speech, asking for repetition, or facilitating speech. A number of affective categories were also proposed, such as showing irritation, gratitude, positive or negative responses. A summary of this model can be found in appendix 13. This model has good face validity, it is readily available, and appears to be fit for the purpose of analysis intended within the present research.

In the MIPS model proposed by Ford et al. (2000) the basic unit of analysis is the utterance, split into independent utterances by conjunctions such as 'and, or, but', and non-restrictive dependent clauses which begin with 'which, when, where and because'. However, there is on-going debate regarding the functional definition of an utterance; others have suggested that the utterance is the total speaking duration, by one person, from the moment speech begins until there is a signal to the conversational partner that it is their time to talk; a pause through dysfluency does not signify the end of an utterance however pauses preceding a new idea, or, intervening comments made, signify the start of a new utterance (Matarazzo & Wiens, 1972). Utterances are then coding according to their content (the topic discussed) and the mode of exchange (i.e. type of question). The affective modes (i.e. laughter, irritation) are used in parallel with a dependant mode and content category. There are also seven global affective categories which will not be used here as this relates to exchanges such as eye contact and physical touch.

The information provided by Ford et al., (2000) and Matarazzo and Wiens (1972) is the basis for the interactional process analysis (IPA) conducted within this study. To ensure the analysis here is reliable, an utterance is defined as the total duration of one person's speech and for each utterance modes of exchange and affective categories will be coded. Each research interview was transcribed and then listened to again to check for clarity. As this analysis is purely investigating interactions it was decided to omit the content category suggested by Ford et al., and, a number of codes were also omitted as they were deemed more appropriate to a medical interaction rather than a research interview. A table defining each mode of exchange can be found in appendix 14. Each transcript was read through and each utterance was coded. To facilitate this process, a coding sheet was devised to record each utterance (appendix 15), and a frequency sheet was also devised to calculate the frequency of each mode of exchange and affective category (appendix 16). Frequencies were calculated individually for the participant and for the researcher.

Further to this, through the use of transcripts and audio recorded data it was possible to collect word count information to highlight the duration of utterances and analyse the 'interactional' element of the interview. The use of audio equipment as well as transcripts ensures a high level of accuracy as the interview can be played until the analyst is certain the correct count has been made (Matarazzo & Wiens, 1972). The mean duration of each speaker's utterance equals the sum of words uttered divided by sum of all utterances.

To ensure consistency in the data analysis across LAC and school staff data sets, analysis began from the same starting point, when the first question was asked regarding the definition of achievement and was terminated after the participant had answered the final question. The introductory script at the start of the interview has been omitted from this analysis as it would skew the IPA results.

#### **4.15. ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND CONSIDERATIONS**

All research was completed in accordance with the British Psychological Society '*Code of Ethics and Conduct*' (2006) and the Division on Educational and Child Psychology '*Professional Practice Guidelines*' (2002). At all times, research was conducted with respect, competence, responsibility and integrity.

##### **4.15.1. INFORMED CONSENT**

To ensure all participants were able to give informed consent to partake in this research, information sheets were provided regarding the nature of the research, its purpose and consequences, and opportunities were given for clarification. An information letter was also provided to both social workers and carers with parental responsibility. At the beginning of each stage of the research cycle the nature of the research project was reiterated and verbal informed consent sought.

##### **4.15.2. DEBRIEFING**

At the end of the research cycle each participant will receive a written summary of the research findings at the earliest possible opportunity, as there is a professional responsibility to provide feedback to participants. In relation to the LAC interviews, during each session the young person was monitored by the interviewer in terms of their emotional well-being and any signs of discomfort which were responded to as appropriate; further assistance would have been available from the designated LAC teacher or a member of the schools pastoral management team if required.

##### **4.15.3. CONFIDENTIALITY**

LAC and school staff were informed prior to data collation that they would not be identifiable within the research report. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in a confidential manner through the omission of the school, pupils, or adult names. All information was stored securely in accordance with the data protection act.

Participants were also informed that the data collected would be analysed thematically and therefore no individual views would be reported. Participants were also informed of the grounds in which confidentiality may be broken, if there is serious concern about the safety, health, or welfare of children or vulnerable adults.

#### **4.15.4. PROTECTION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Particular care and attention was paid to the protection of participant well-being throughout the research process. Respect and consideration was demonstrated at all times, regardless of individual differences (for example age, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, socio-economic status). Participants were treated in a fair and unprejudiced way and were advised of their right to withdraw at any point with no subsequent consequences.

#### **4.15.5. AVOIDANCE OF DECEPTION**

There was no intentional deception of participants at any point during this research. The nature and purpose of the research will be made clear from the outset.

#### **4.15.6. BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH**

It was also hoped there would be a number of benefits to this research:

- This presents an opportunity for LAC to communicate their personal experiences and views, to explore how we can improve the school experience for LAC, and in doing so, hopefully promote positive outcomes.
- Those professionals working within the education sector and with LAC will have a more comprehensive understanding of the factors enhancing school success for LAC, from the perspective of all stakeholders.
- The application of AI within the educational psychology arena can be further explored and its usefulness considered in terms of its future application.



## CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

This thesis aims to identify key factors which have the greatest impact on the school experience of LAC, in secondary schools, through the use of AI. AI is an affirmatively focused approach which aims to discover the 'best of what is' within an organisation and then build upon these strengths and successes, to create positive change.

A systematic literature review identified there is a gap in the literature base concerning the application of AI within educational settings and to date AI has not been used with LAC or the professionals who work with them. This thesis therefore also provided an opportunity to explore the efficacy of AI as a research tool, for working with both LAC and school staff, and as a tool for creating change.

Four research questions were proposed, detailed below, and within this chapter each question will be answered independently. The questions were:

1. Through the use of appreciative inquiry, what factors are identified within the chosen secondary school, as having the greatest positive impact on the school experience of looked after children?
2. Is appreciative inquiry a valuable and effective research tool for working with looked after children?
3. Is appreciative inquiry a valuable and effective research tool for working with school staff?
4. How likely is appreciative inquiry to be effective, within the chosen secondary school, in creating change?

Before presenting the data pertaining to the above research questions it is important to report the participant definitions of achievement obtained during the research interviews. Further to the define stage each participant was asked to define achievement, given the strong emphasis on academic

achievement in the literature review, to ascertain if the school's definition of achievement aligned with national indicators.

### **5.1. DEFINING 'ACHIEVEMENT' OF LAC**

LAC defined achievement as:

- Obtaining good grades and reaching the level they were expected to achieve.
- Being able to attend the school sixth form provision, a further education setting, or getting a good job.
- Receiving enough 'commendations' (school rewards) to get a free driving lesson by the end of year 11.

From a school staff perspective, achievement was defined as:

- Achieving realistic academic targets and fulfilling their academic potential. It was also recognised that it was important the child strived to achieve short-term goals rather than a pure focus on 'end of school outcomes'.
- Being included in all elements of school life from year 7 to year 11 (or length of time at school) and maintaining their school placement.
- Developing and maintaining peer relationships.

### **5.2. RESEARCH QUESTION 1**

- Through the use of appreciative inquiry, what factors are identified within the chosen secondary school, as having the greatest positive impact on the school experience of looked after children?

### 5.2.1. THEMATIC ANALYSIS

In line with the principles of a thematic analysis (section 4.13.3) key themes were identified with participants and then triangulated to provide a coherent list of group themes. Each theme is explored in the following sections.

Due to the small number of participants involved in this research, the following quotations are referenced as either ‘child’ or ‘adult’ to further protect the identity of participants. Whilst this decision is in accordance with ethical practice, where the anonymity of participants is paramount, it is acknowledged that this poses a number of potential problems as this distracts from the richness and coherence of the data, and, eliminates the possibility of illustrating the representativeness of quotations used.

### 5.3. THEME 1: EFFECTIVE ADULT SUPPORT

The overarching theme of effective adult support was further defined by a number of subthemes including: the general compatibility between staff and pupils, the availability of academic support, the availability of pastoral support, and the key role of staff members such as the learning mentor. Each subtheme is explored below.

#### 5.3.1. GENERAL COMPATIBILITY

The compatibility between LAC and school staff was identified as a key factor in relation to effective adult support. The working relationship was at times conceptualised as a ‘friendship’ and compatibility was heightened when it was perceived there were mutual benefits.

Child: *“...we started having laughs and then started to help each other ... like when I first went to that school my spelling was really, really, bad and ever since the TA started teach -- helping me, my grammar has got a lot better ... and my TA never knew how to cook, so I helped with that.”*

Adult: *“a lot of it’s [success] to do with the relationship that exists, as with any child... between the teachers and the pupil.”*

Adult: *“sometimes pupils don't get on with maybe the TA, and you swap them round, it's just life ... with some kids, I just go “I could not possibly put them with that person.”*

It was also recognised that adult support should be reliable and consistent, and school staff should also be able to set clear rules and boundaries.

Child: *“I'm glad I always had someone there to support me, otherwise I would never have got through.”*

Adult: *“... in my eyes ... it's the consistency of having a certain TA; with the likes of the say me, I was his TA from year 7...”*

Adult: *“[boundaries]... I do think that's very, very important for all people. I think everybody works better if you know the ground rules and I do think a highly structured ... erm ... mutual ... mutually beneficial system is much better than, you know, letting children do their own thing or letting staff do their own thing.”*

Adult: *“...we're not moving the rules, we're not making allowances, the rules stay... working on the principle that that's what he knows so if I suddenly change the rules then he's not gonna understand why I've changed.”*

It was also reported that adult support served a dual purpose meeting both the academic and pastoral needs of the LAC; neither of these factors were viewed as superior.

Child: *“...they're to help you if you need help with your work with - or if you need someone to talk to you, you've got them there as well... I think it's better to just like be able to talk to teachers about anything instead of like trying to keep it to yourself and stuff.”*

Adult: *“I think it's important here that we work, as well, with the consciousness, that you need both nurture and authority ...”*

Adult: *“when you're a TA it's kind of like your second mom, because they don't have that at home... you know you've got to be assertive [with learning]... you can't always be the mother figure.”*

### **5.3.2. ACADEMIC SUPPORT**

In terms of academic support it was argued that in-class support was most effective when it is of 'high quality' and when it is responsive to the needs of the LAC. Support was perceived most effective when provided discretely and informally, particularly as the LAC becomes more independent.

Child: *“... cos mainly, if you need help, you can ask one of the learning support teachers which are in there...”*

Child: *“it's good when the teachers aren't taking over when you're trying to do something...”*

Adult: *“I think it can be -- I think it can ruin the child if a TA is sat next to that pupil constantly it makes them say “ you've got a problem” which to me is not fair.”*

Adult: *“now he's more grown up he's...[identifiable information removed] it's not a formal one-to-one, it's like 'aah I've got 10 minutes we'll go and have a chat and we'll have a coffee in the canteen and I find that I get a lot more information over a cup of coffee in the canteen...”*

School staff also recognised that adult support extended beyond curriculum content and there was a key role in developing self-organisation skills, i.e. meeting coursework deadlines.

Adult: *“[name removed] would not be able to go home and remember... he wouldn't think to put his PE kit in his bag the night before and he certainly wouldn't remember in the morning!”*

Adult: *“phone calls home helped pupils... when they come in the following day they've got everything, and they're not going to get into any more trouble ...”*

Adult: *“we've really had to have a very structured programme almost as you would have with a year 7, in that you're literally guiding them by the hand through the coursework, you know...”*

Personalised academic tutoring had also been made available for LAC, arranged by school staff and social care.

Child: *“I've got a maths tutor who comes every Monday after school ... social services have done it for me ... I've nearly finished it now, I've been doing [it] since June or July...”*

### **5.3.3. PASTORAL SUPPORT**

In pastoral terms, it was recognised that within school there should be two or three key adults, who are consistently involved with the LAC. It was also recognised that school staff should have a good understanding of the LAC, including knowledge of the child, their family, their current circumstances, and their pre-care / care experiences.

Child: *“[name removed] knows most of what's going on as well... she knows what's going on through the past as well, so then she knows the situation about being in care”*

Child: *“...it's good...so you don't have to explain the situation over and over again”*

Child: *“I think it's better like if there's more than one, but not loads, just if there's say two or three, so if you -- you want to speak to the teachers who knows what's going on, one of them's not -- if they're not in, then you want someone else to be able to talk to.”*

Adult: *“the benefit for [name removed] is I've been the key worker in school who knows who the key workers are at home, I can refer to them by their first names; we know where they're actually living and who else is living there, you need to have that level of knowledge about the child.”*

#### **5.3.4. LEARNING MENTOR SUPPORT**

LAC also made particular reference to the support provided by the learning mentors in school. In particular the nurturing nature of support i.e. drinks and snacks was emphasised, alongside the availability of the academic support. LAC specified they would choose to access the learning mentors as they were trustworthy and supportive, particularly around social issues such as bullying. The real strength was that these sessions were child-directed.

Child: *“well, she helps me with anything that-- what happened... cos in year seven, eight, and nine, I got bullied a lot but now I don't.”*

Child: *“she does it, all types of things ... just comes into my ASDAN lesson and sits in there as well sometimes ... she comes in and helps everyone in the class.”*

#### **5.4. THEME 2: ENGAGING LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**

Engaging learning opportunities are further defined by a number of subheadings including: flexible learning opportunities, stimulating learning tasks, and purposeful homework. Each of these subthemes will be explored overleaf.

#### 5.4.1. FLEXIBLE LEARNING

Learning opportunities were perceived to be most effective when they were flexible and personalised to meet the needs of the LAC, for example, access to college courses, or, opting out of certain school subjects. Children also valued the opportunity to attend additional study groups i.e. at lunchtime.

Child: *“...on Tuesday I go to college half a day... with beauty therapy...I’ve learnt more new friends.”*

Child: *“I do Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday... I have Wednesday off... [for revision].”*

Child: *“they do like after-school stuff like maths club and English club which is good.”*

Adult: *“...so I said, “ok, I think we’re going to take it out and put him into something else”, so, we went through, obviously, to see what else was available and decided on IT.”*

Adult: *“...what about, if it’s okay with [pupil], we come up at lunchtime... and maybe break time, two or three times a week to catch up... and no word of a lie... he’s actually further ahead than the rest of the class.”*

#### 5.4.2. STIMULATING LEARNING TASKS

LAC reported they enjoyed tasks which were challenging, particularly when they were presented as collaborative group work opportunities, or, if the child had a target to beat. LAC also identified they were more likely to behave appropriately when the work was perceived to be ‘good’.

Child: *“...there was this like hard equation that hardly anyone can do and I just sort of looked at it and I did it!”*



Child: *“well, I was kind of nervous because it was our first drama lesson...but then it was alright because there was a big group of us...we sometimes struggled a bit. After we did do the big group it was a proper-- it was, like, better...”*

Child: *“...but like and when we do get good work and we all like behave...”*

Child: *“... so like if you've got a target, you try and beat it...”*

Adult: *“you still have to challenge the child to make progress and to achieve, whether it's academic achievements or social achievements or sports achievements or artistic achievements, whatever...”*

#### **5.4.3. PURPOSEFUL HOMEWORK**

LAC initially expressed their reluctance to do homework, especially during the first three years of secondary school. There was little importance placed on completing homework and the associated consequences had little impact. However, it was recognised that there were occasions where children were more likely to do homework, for example, if it related to course outcomes such as GCSEs or if it was linked to revision.

Child: *“No... I didn't do it [homework] when I was in year 7 and 8 and 9... I just got detentions...”*

Child: *“yeah, I do like the ones in technology and stuff heading towards the GCSEs at the end of year 11 ... or revising for a test...”*

Within this theme school staff emphasised the importance of providing opportunities within school to complete homework and that on occasions there should be differentiated expectations due to the challenges the home environment can present.

Adult: *“...and giving him the chance to do homework in school ... it's been really important.”*

Adult: *“... because for a lot of these kids, homework and home-- school work and home don't mix.”*

### **5.5. THEME 3: REWARDING SCHOOL SYSTEMS**

The theme of rewarding school systems is further defined by a number of subthemes: the importance of school rewards and consequences, and, extracurricular opportunities. Each theme will be discussed below:

#### **5.5.1. IMPORTANCE OF REWARDS AND CONSEQUENCES**

The importance of an effective reward system was raised by all participants, as a method of giving positive feedback and also in facilitating a sense of achievement. One child in particular highlighted the importance of this by describing a peak experience which centred on the achievement of school merits for efforts and achievements. School staff also emphasised the importance of rewarding children in a way which is meaningful, i.e. through the use of gestures alongside school based rewards i.e. merits.

Child: *“... one of them (drawing) is about awards 'cos I achieved quite a lot of them...’*

Child: *“So like I want to get as many commendations as I can... to try to get the first driving lesson, and then try and practise from there!”*

Adult: *“I said that's just for you to put in your pocket, and his face just literally lit up and it was only a 40p cream egg.”*

Adult: *“...we think of anything we can do to get them praise off the teachers, particularly off the teachers who they think are quite hard... sometimes he'll say [name of teacher removed] that he really needs a boost, so find something to praise him for.”*

On the flip side of this, staff also reported it was important that consequences were meaningful, especially to real-life and within the home context.

Adult: *“we often get kids who want to go in the armed forces but they can't obey rules here ... so I tell them experiences around all the training we had to do ... if you can't handle being told to walk on the left-hand side of the corridor here, how you going to cope with the sort of grievances that I had?”*

Adult: *“I'll ring dad when let's say [name removed] upsets or [name removed] been really rude to somebody or he got a detention... and it worked really well because dad would put in place to take his telly off him or he wouldn't be allowed to go on the computer ... so, being sanctioned from a parent works really well...”*

Adult: *“when we've had behaviour issues we've related this not just to school but outside of school; in schools one thing but do that outside of school and you're gonna lose your job, or, you're going to get arrested.”*

### **5.5.2. EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

Participants also recognised the importance of access to extra-curricular opportunities, for example, attending school trips and school based clubs such as 'social club'. The importance of the school prom was also acknowledged.

Child: *“I went away in -- with history -- in March which was good... I've done quite a few trips with geography as well.”*

Child: *“Erm... I used to go to...erm... social club which is on Tuesday which is like badminton, sometimes basketball ... tennis outside and stuff.”*

Child: *“we've got a prom coming up soon!”*

Adult: *“one of the things we say to the kids ... is from quite early on, if we want to see you at prom ... in your tux -- tux or in your party dress, erm... looking brilliant and having a dance with us...”*

#### **5.6. THEME 4: A SAFE AND SECURE ENVIRONMENT**

Participants identified school was a stable, safe, and secure environment. This included physical attributes such as security cameras and school gates, and, the clear school ethos regarding acceptable behaviour and behaviour management. School was also perceived to be a place where children could take safe risks, with particular reference paid to opportunities to use the cooker which they were prevented from doing at home.

Child: *“because, it's just using stuff that you can't normally use at home... because your parents, or you're carers, say it's too dangerous, but at school they actually trust you to use the equipment properly.”*

Adult: *“it's about making them secure ... they come from a broken family or whatever reason there in care ... they don't maybe feel secure a home...”*

Adult: *“[consistency] and that makes him feel safe, he feels safe and he feels calm when everything else around him is calm and he knows where he is; when things change he gets unsettled very, very quickly.”*

Adult: *“At the forefront of our ethos is mutual respect and discipline... we provide a safe, secure atmosphere and environment for our children in which good behaviour... and mutual respect our valued highly”*

## 5.7. THEME 5: GOOD QUALITY RELATIONSHIPS

The theme of social relationships was particularly pertinent and is further defined by two key subthemes: the relationships between LAC and their peers, and the relationships between school and carers. Each theme is discussed below.

### 5.7.1. IMPORTANCE OF PEER RELATIONSHIPS

Friendships and peer relationships were perceived to be central to the positive school experience of LAC. Children felt it was important they were linked with known peers on entry to school and good peer relationships contributed to a great school atmosphere. School staff also regarded the development of peer relationships with high importance.

Child: *“When I came -- because they try and put you in houses with some people you know so that’s ok and [name removed] was in my second primary school.”*

Child: *“you can enjoy coming [to school] to be with friends...”*

Child: *“[the best things are] having a laugh with your friends and with your teachers.”*

Adult: *“For me, it’s very much to keep up with social side of things, you know the personal side of things, you know that he’s still confident that he’s still mixing...”*

Children reported friendships were most effective when peers were fun, trustworthy and helpful. Effective friendships also provide a source of academic and emotional support for the child.

Child: *“[friends are] people who don’t mind to have a laugh and stuff but...like, they don’t tell the secrets I would tell them...”*

Child: *“Err... they’re just good really nice friends, they like help me with this stuff ... like things I have to sort out all like when I*

*have homework and someone is in the same lessons I don't understand, I could ask that person.”*

Child: *“...people that just like try and find out what's wrong if you're upset, and try and ... err, they'll try and help you like, sort out what's wrong with you and stuff...”*

Child: *“they accept me for who I am; they know everything anyway... if you get in trouble, there'll always be there for you... and they won't let you down.”*

School staff also perceived they had a role in facilitating peer relationships, through informal education of social skills in pastoral sessions and in facilitating group work sessions.

Adult: *“we've spent 12 months literally going through -- one day a week, sitting in the library talking about it and going into everything that happened that week, anything I'd seen that I wasn't very comfortable with, erm, and I could chat with him and say 'do you think maybe they're not including you because of this?' or 'do you think that maybe that language is putting people off being your friend?' so we did one-to-one sessions, erm, maybe longer than that, it was probably 18 months.”*

#### **5.7.2. RELATIONSHIP WITH CARERS:**

All participants recognised the importance of good home-school relationships. This is achieved through routine, low key, links to share general information, and to share positive feedback as well as concerns.

Child: *“well there's this problem and [name removed] will just -- is going to come into school to ask if -- so we don't have to go into our uniform again.”*

Adult: *“...our relationship their carer is superb which is important.”*

Adult: *“We are not just getting all the parents, carers, and grandparents or whoever when there is an issue ... but we make a phone call home saying “he's been smashing today ... he got himself a merit for doing really well in ...”*

Adult: *“this system that works for us at the time was very close links with home... there was constant communication so that we knew what was going on at home and they knew what was going on in school.”*

It is also important that carers are fully included in school life; carers are invited to attend school events and they are referred to as the child's family.

Adult: *“when we invite them to anything we say you can bring your family and he knows we mean the people from the care home... So, they've got invites to parent's evenings, the monitoring days, school reports and all the normal things that parents would have.”*

#### **5.8. THEME 6: NORMALISING THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE**

Both children and adult participants recognised the importance of 'normalising' the school experience for LAC. This was reflected through the recognition that LAC should not be singled out, they should not be treated differently to other pupils, and all children should have equal opportunities regardless of their 'looked after' status.

Child: *“It should be the same for everyone because like even if you're not in care, then some people still have problems that they think is a bit embarrassing or ... they're a bit -- to annoyed to like -- upset or something and they should talk to some of their teachers.”*

Child: *“if they needed help, then she'd go, it's not just for me, but other people in the classroom that needed help as well.”*

Adult: *“... if you leave these kids alone... as I said to you last time, the last thing that these kids need is somebody constantly doing some assessments with them here or some discussions with them there if they don't want it because if your constant sort of intervening with them ... then you're constantly reinforcing the message that they are different...”*

## **5.9. SUPPLEMENTARY THEMES**

During the thematic analysis, a number of supplementary themes were raised that could not be fully triangulated within the data, however, these were pertinent in the reality of the organisation and they are therefore classified as supplementary themes; for example, this includes participation in PEP meetings which was raised by one LAC and one member of staff. There were a further three themes which were only identified in the staff interviews and for that reason cannot be triangulated across the data sets. These themes included the importance of staff training, promoting the child's emotional well-being, and effective staff team qualities. Each of the supplementary themes are discussed in the following sections.

### **5.9.1. PARTICIPATION IN PEP MEETINGS**

School staff and children recognised the importance of PEP meetings. Children in particular recognised this meeting as an opportunity to receive feedback on how they were doing at school and an opportunity to collaboratively explore problem areas, or difficulties, and to come up with solutions. School staff acknowledged the PEP meeting as a useful mechanism for monitoring, however, it was suggested that some of the reviews could take place without the child knowing so they didn't feel targeted as a LAC.

Child: *“...because then we know what's going on like -what -- how the teacher's think we're getting on, and how -- so they know how we're getting on at home as well... or they can help sort out the situations that then our carer, [name removed], finds out -- to find out -- and see how we can sort things out...the solutions to like problems...”*



Child: *"...I had a choice whether I wanted to or not. The first couple I didn't go to because they were at the [name removed] centre and I didn't really like it there, as I used to always go...and...erm... but ever since I did, I know, I understand more about what goes on in like social workers stuff... so people like, children in care should be like given the choice whether they want to go or not because it might upset them."*

Adult: *"we have the normal monitoring... obviously there's the personal educational plans that come up every six months which are good... but a lot of those reviews you can do without necessarily having to sort of like let the child know you're doing it..."*

#### **5.9.2. IMPORTANCE OF STAFF TRAINING**

The importance of staff training was identified, provided by both local and national providers. Particular benefits were identified including: making legislation accessible, supporting staff keeping up to date with policy developments and publications, and the positive impact on staff confidence.

Adult: *"and training in itself is important ... err ... how can I put this [hesitates]... it has to be by its nature not specific. You can't sort of say, "do this in this circumstance and do that in that circumstance ... what you really looking for in training is for a vehicle to discuss the sort of situation that could develop."*

Adult: *"[recalling training] I mean there were solicitors where his job it is to look at legislation and then condense it into a powerful purpose and it's very, very useful. That was really useful."*

Adult: *"he's got a reactive attachment disorder, anyways, he's diagnosed as RAD so I had to know and keep to the guidelines and when he came back I spoke to form tutors and everybody and said what we do is to keep it very calm..."*

### 5.9.3. DEVELOPING EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

School staff also commented on the importance of promoting self-esteem, self-confidence, and to challenge negative self-perceptions.

Adult: *“basically it’s ... it’s giving them the confidence that they can do well...they come in the lowest and [we] build them up to the highest, probably more than what they could expect to ever do...”*

Adult: *“basically, it’s the self-esteem; a lot of children just have lack of self-esteem”*

Adult: *“well he’s lost confidence in himself and he doesn’t think that he is worth the effort and he had given up which was quite sad to see...”*

Adult: *“we have had some issues where he has queried things like having a reader for his exams because his receptive language is much better than when you read something and I’ve sat with him and he’s said “I don’t need a reader I’m not disabled” and I’ve said “I know you’re not disabled”, and you know, over those two years we’ve had quite a few conversations where I’ve said to him “yes you may have a statement but that in no way means you are disabled.”*

Staff also indicated the importance of supporting the child to overcome challenges and develop problem-solving skills both in relation to learning experiences and social interactions, in order to equip them with the skills required in adult life.

Adult: *“ so, it’s good to be able to see that if there are problems, they learn to handle those problems, they learn how to deal with those problems, because - ‘cos you know you can’t expect any child to go through life without experiencing some*

*difficulties... and if they can handle them, then that's a good thing.*

#### **5.9.4. CORE QUALITIES OF AN EFFECTIVE STAFF TEAM**

The staff team were perceived to be working most successfully when there were trusting relationships between staff, good communication between individuals and between departments, and when all staff members have consistently high expectations and a core belief that 'all' children can achieve.

Adult: *"... staff will trust me and say, "look, can you give this kid and other six months or so because he's having a tough time, whatever it is that's going on at home, and staff would say "okay then fine, we'll try"... but then I'll go with them, I'll trust their professional judgement..."*

Adult: *"... we do try into briefings on the most critical kids at the start of each term ... with photos and the photos in the staff room and we try and make sure all staff know."*

Adult: *"...so I can say, if you see him in the morning and he's worked up, don't take him to a lesson... we've got to work together basically as a team... I've got to make sure the obviously I could communicate with another member of staff."*

Adult: *"We now link up with learning support and that's really good, it's really convenient, but even before that I was in learning support so I spent a lot of time talking to the pastoral staff, so they were aware of his needs as well."*

Adult: *"As well, we want all children to achieve; we don't differentiate or expect any less because they happen to be looked after children."*

During the course of the interviews, participants identified core staff attributes which contributed to successful working, which included: being open minded, optimistic, non-judgemental, to show unconditional regard, and an approach which is non-confrontational, patient and calm.

#### **5.10. THEMATIC ANALYSIS SUMMARY**

Through triangulation of the interview data a number of key themes have emerged which describe those instances where the school organisation is working at its best. These themes are: effective adult support, engaging learning opportunities, rewarding school systems, a safe and secure environment, good quality relationships, and normalising the school experience. A number of supplementary themes were also identified which included: participation in PEP meetings, the importance of staff training, promoting emotional well-being, a sound understanding of the child, and characteristics of an effective staff team were defined. These themes summarised in figure 3.1 and 4.1 overleaf.

Key themes:



*Figure 3.1. Summary of key themes identified which have the most positive impact on the school experience of LAC*

Supplementary themes:



*Figure 4.1. Summary of supplementary themes identified which have the most positive impact of the school experience of LAC*

Before moving on to review the provocative propositions composed, it is important to emphasise the quality and breadth of data generated regarding the peak experiences of participants interviewed. They were diverse in their nature and provided rich descriptive data. A brief summary of each peak experiences can be found in appendix 16.

### **5.11. PROVOCATIVE PROPOSITIONS**

Following the identification of themes, the next stage of the 4-D cycles is the development of provocative propositions. With children these were composed collaboratively. With adults, due to time restrictions, the provocative propositions were initially composed by the researcher and statements were sent to participants for checking. In line with the amalgamation of themes provocative propositions were condensed into a comprehensive list representative of the participant's views. 16 propositions were composed:

1. 'We develop relationships with children based on trust, through being reliable and dependable, and showing interest in them.'
2. 'We provide high quality academic support that is responsive to the needs of the child. We aim to support them in their learning, problem-solving, and organisational skills.'
3. 'We provide high quality pastoral support, where each child has a named person, who can respond to their pastoral needs, and, who has an in-depth knowledge of them and their care situation, prior to (or immediately after) the child arrives at our school.'
4. 'Everyone involved in the child's education, have a common understanding of the child's individual needs; they are open minded, optimistic, non-judgemental and believe in the child's potential.'
5. 'We have a Learning Mentor support scheme in place which is flexible and responsive to the needs of children in our care.'

6. 'We provide a personalised and flexible approach to learning where children can readily access additional support through lunchtime tuition, homework clubs, and cooperative learning experiences within the classroom.'
7. 'We have a clear and achievable reward system in place, which is meaningful and inspiring. This is complimented through rewards (i.e. praise, gestures) and sanctions which are meaningful.'
8. We provide a range of educational trips and extra-curricular activities which are accessible to all of our pupils.'
9. 'All children within our school feel safe and secure, children are encouraged to take safe risks, and we have a clear school ethos regarding appropriate behaviour and conduct.'
10. 'As a staff team we aim to facilitate effective peer relationships; we support children in developing effective social skills and respond to any incidents of bullying appropriately.'
11. 'We strive to develop and maintain good home-school relationships; we routinely communicate with carers, we include them in all aspects of school life, and we aim to build mutually respectful, trusting relationships.'
12. 'We do not reduce expectations because of "care" status and all our children have equal access to school opportunities. We continue to refer to our own data and observations whilst taking into account the additional needs such children may have.'
13. 'Children are included in their PEP meetings and their views are sought. We give appropriate feedback and explore any areas of concern, collaboratively identifying solutions.'



14. 'We continue to access training and resources to support our work with LAC, as they become available. We strive to cascade this information through to the appropriate teaching and pastoral staff.'
15. 'Our aim is to equip children with problem solving skills, to encourage them to take responsibility for their learning, and we provide discrete support to develop their skills as independent beings.'
16. 'We strive to work in a staff team where there is trust, and open communication, both between individuals and departments. All staff have consistently high expectations for our children, and there is a core belief that all children can achieve.'

## **5.12. RESEARCH QUESTION 2**

- Is appreciative inquiry a valuable and effective research tool for working with looked after children?

Information was triangulated from three main sources of data: interactional process analysis (IPA), evaluation questionnaires, and thematic analysis of the research diary. Each source is explored individually below:

### **5.12.1. INTERACTIVE PROCESS ANALYSIS**

Each interview was analysed in accordance with the interactional process analysis (IPA) detailed in the methodology section (section 4.14.2), which purely focuses on the AI interview. Interviews with LAC varied in length from 21:53 minutes to 26:34, with a mean duration of 24:36 minutes. The total interaction, including thematic analysis and composing provocative propositions, ranged from 41:03 minutes to 51:30 minutes.

The predominant modes of exchange utilised by the LAC were:

1. Gives information (positive)
2. Agreement
3. Gives information (neutral)

The predominant modes of exchange utilised by the researcher were:

1. Open Questions
2. Closed Questions
3. Summarises

For reference purposes an extract of a completed IPA analysis can be found in appendix 15 and a detailed analysis of the modes of each exchange used within each interview can be found in appendix 17.

#### **5.12.2. MEAN UTTERANCE DURATION**

The mean utterance duration was also calculated to further explore the ‘interactional’ element of the AI interview. The mean utterance duration, across all three interviews was 13 words by the LAC and 18 words by the researcher. On average the LAC participation accounted for 42% of the interview and the researcher participation accounted for 58% of the interview (see appendix 20).

The data above indicates that the AI interview achieved what it purported to do; it presents a medium for asking questions and encourages information sharing from participants. Whilst the data analysis also suggests that the AI interview was interactive to a degree, contributions were weighted towards the researcher. The interview was more conversation in comparison with ‘typical’ research interviews. These findings will be further explored in Chapter 6.

#### **5.12.3. EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRES**

Following the interview session, all young people were asked to complete a questionnaire to evaluate their AI experience. Responses were summarised and the main findings were:

- All children felt that they had been listened to throughout the interview process with a mean rating of 9.6 out of 10 (1 being not at all, 10 being very much so).

- When asked which questions were easiest to answer, all participants identified the question regarding their peak experience as easiest to answer. Participants reported talking about their positive experiences felt 'nice' and 'comfortable'.
- Unanimously, all children found the three wishes question the most difficult to answer.
- All participants felt they had been able to discuss their concerns within the AI framework. One participant reported it was 'easier' to discuss the positive experiences.
- Children reported that the development of provocative propositions was relatively easy with a mean rating of 4.6 out of 10. (1 being very easy, 10 being very difficult). However, this process was largely directed by the researcher and participants reflected this activity would have been difficult to complete independently.
- All participants felt they had been able to discuss important issues during the course of the interview and had no further issues to raise at the end of the interview.
- If the research interview was to be repeated, children reported they would all be happy for the interview to take the same format. Participants did not express any preference to meeting within the home or school setting, and when asked, all of the participants expressed a preference for being interviewed individually.

#### **5.12.4. RESEARCH DIARY**

Through thematic analysis of the research diary two key themes emerged which were pertinent to AI and children. Each theme is detailed in the following sections:

#### **5.12.4.i. ENGAGEMENT WITH AI**

LAC who participated in the research interview appeared happy to meet with the researcher. During the course of the interview no questions were refused and none of the participants chose to withdraw. This experience appeared to be enjoyed by both the LAC and the researcher.

At the start of the interview, the AI methodology was explained in simple terms to LAC and this was readily accepted. Participants showed little interest in the methodological considerations and no further questions were asked.

It was noticeable that some LAC were more difficult to engage in free-flowing dialogue, even when employing more creative means such as drawing and storytelling. One child in particular was somewhat reserved, becoming more animated and engaged when conversing about non-emotive topics such as the ability to draw or their hobbies and interests.

#### **5.12.4.ii. INDEPENDENT CREATIVE THINKING**

Throughout the course of the research interviews observations were made concerning the notion of independent creative thinking. At times it was somewhat difficult to facilitate creative thinking with LAC, especially regarding more abstract questions, such as the three wishes question or the development of provocative propositions. Consequently, the researcher was largely responsible for the identification of themes and the development of provocative propositions.

### **5.13. RESEARCH QUESTION 3**

- Is appreciative inquiry a valuable and effective research tool for working with education staff?

Information was triangulated from three main sources of data: interactional process analysis (IPA), evaluation questionnaires, and thematic analysis of the research diary. Each source is explored individually in the following sections.

### **5.13.1. INTERACTIONAL PROCESS ANALYSIS**

Each interview was analysed in accordance with the interactional process analysis detailed in the methodology section (section 4.14.2) following the same format as the analysis with LAC interviews. Interviews with school staff varied in length from 45:59 minutes to 53:56, mean duration of 48.59 minutes.

The predominant modes of exchange utilised by school staff were:

- 1. Gives information (positive)**
- 2. Gives information (negative)**
- 3. Gives information (neutral)**

The predominant modes of exchange utilised by the researcher were:

- 1. Open questions**
- 2. Registering speech**
- 3. Summarising**

A breakdown of the modes of exchange used within each interview can be found in appendix 19.

### **5.13.2. MEAN UTTERANCE DURATION**

Again, with staff interviews the mean utterance duration was calculated to further explore the interactional element of the AI interview. The mean utterance duration across all three interviews was 35 words for the school staff and 12 words for the researcher. Based on the total number of utterance the school staff, on average, spoke for 82% of the interview and the researcher spoke for 18%. Calculations are detailed in appendix 20.

Aligned with the LAC analysis, the data above indicates that the AI interview achieved what it purported to do; providing a medium for asking questions and encouraging information sharing from participants. The data analysis also suggests that the AI interview was interactive and the process was largely

owned by school staff participants. These findings will be further explored in Chapter 6.

### **5.13.3. EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRES**

Following the AI interview school staff were asked to check the lists of themes identified and the provocative propositions composed for validity, and, to complete an evaluation questionnaire. Whilst feedback was given from all participants regarding the accuracy of themes and provocative propositions, the rate of evaluation questionnaires returned was poor, with only a 50% rate of return.

- All staff respondents felt that they had been listened to throughout the interview process, with a mean rating of 9 out of 10 (1 being not at all, 10 being very much so).
- When asked which questions were easiest to answer, participants identified the question regarding their peak experience and the identification of core factors leading to the success of the organisation.
- All staff respondents found the three wishes question the most difficult to answer.
- Staff felt that they had been able to discuss both their successes and their concerns within the AI framework.
- Staff reported that the provocative propositions suggested were relatively representative of their views, with a mean rating of 6.5 out of 10 (1 being not representative, 10 being highly representative).
- Whilst it was largely reflected that the respondents felt they had been able to discuss all the pertinent issues during the AI interview, it was reiterated that the needs of all LAC are different and it is difficult to generalise these needs.

- If the research interview was to be repeated, staff would be happy for the interview to take the same format. However, it was indicated that it would have been desirable to include children within the interview process.

#### **5.13.4. RESEARCH DIARY**

Through thematic analysis of the research diary three key themes emerged which were pertinent to AI and school staff. It is important to reiterate here that this information is regarding the first stages of the AI 4-D cycle and issues pertaining to the workshop will be addressed in section (5.14). Each theme is detailed in the following sections:

##### **5.13.4.i. IMPLEMENTING AI**

At the start of each research interview the AI process was explained to all school staff participants. Participants readily accepted this methodology and showed little curiosity in the process; no further questions were asked.

Some difficulties were noted in directing school staff to pinpoint a peak experience and participants often chose to talk about peak experiences in broader terms, for example, children engaging in lessons, rather than describing a particular experience pertinent to that member of staff. Naturally, school staff chose to describe the challenges and barriers to education experienced by LAC and needed redirecting to consider their successes. At times, it appeared that this meeting provided an opportunity for school staff to offload their concerns and discuss their experiences rather than focusing on the questions asked.

##### **5.13.4.ii. TIME RESTRICTIONS**

Meetings and workshops with school staff were heavily restricted by time constraints. Participants were only released from timetabling duties for one hour which meant the interview session had to solely focus on the semi-structured interview schedule and there was no time to collaboratively explore themes and to develop the provocative propositions. The designated LAC teacher was also reluctant to make arrangements for group meetings as

staff could not be relieved from timetabling duties at the same time. There was a strong reluctance to arrange meetings outside of the school day due to the existing demands on staff workloads.

#### **5.13.4.iii. COMMITMENT TO RESEARCH**

The final theme which emerged through the research diary was the commitment demonstrated towards the research. Due to unforeseen circumstances, there was a change in staffing, and the designated LAC teacher who was initially approached during the initial stages of this research left the school. The newly appointed designated LAC teacher therefore inherited this research and whilst the commitment to participation was honoured, and there was an eagerness for the research to continue, the teacher appeared more interested in the participation of LAC rather than the participation of school staff. This was also reinforced through ongoing communication which suggested this research was not a high priority and was subject to competing demands. For example, when meetings were confirmed, discourse was used such as “Friday looks good (so far!)”. The implicit message conveyed was that something more important may arise.

#### **5.14. RESEARCH QUESTION 4**

- How likely is appreciative inquiry to be effective, within the chosen secondary school, in creating change?

Information was triangulated from three main sources: outcomes of the final workshop, participant evaluations, and thematic analysis of the research diary. The data generated conveys positive support for the likelihood of AI in creating change in the chosen secondary school. These findings are explored further in the following sections.

##### **5.14.1. THE WORKSHOP**

At the end of the AI 4-D cycle, in-line with the design and destiny phases, a workshop was planned for key members of school staff to inform future educational planning. During this workshop the themes identified and the provocative propositions composed were fed back; dreams for the future were



also discussed to create a shared vision. Whilst young people were invited to participate in this workshop they declined this offer, expressing a preference for the researcher to convey their views instead.

#### **5.14.2. DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE**

During the final part of the semi-structured interview, participants were asked to state their dreams for the future. These wishes were collated into a group list and are detailed below:

- Stable temporary care placements whilst the child is being placed into a long term care agreement.
- Overnight provision at school, possibly offering respite provision, to support children during periods of upheaval.
- Availability of an off-site nurturing provision, or a quiet room in school, which can accommodate children when they are experiencing difficulties managing within the mainstream school environment.
- Clear communication between all parties, including schools and social services (i.e. response to referrals, and generally greater liaison).
- Professionals across all settings (i.e. home and school) adopting the same approaches in setting clear boundaries for the child.
- All staff having a good understanding of the child and their pre-care experiences.
- All LAC having a named key-worker in school who acts as a point of contact for professionals.
- A more robust transfer process to facilitate the transition of LAC who are leaving the last year of primary school and moving into the first year of secondary school.

- More time available within the designated LAC teacher role to fulfil responsibilities, to allow thinking space, and to enable proactive work.
- LAC able to access support from other children (peer support), alongside the support provided by school staff.
- Greater opportunities for rewarding experiences within the school rewards systems i.e. small group bowling trips.
- Improve the aesthetic appearance of, and facilities within, the school environment.
- For lessons to be fun and opportunities for children to do the subjects enjoyed most.
- Less homework.
- Teachers not to be ‘too strict’.

When these dreams were shared within the workshop, key actions were agreed; these were recorded as field notes, typed, and returned to the designated LAC teacher as an ongoing prompt for reflection and action. A copy of these field notes are attached in appendix 23.

#### **5.14.3. EVALUATION DATA QUESTIONNAIRE**

After each of the data collection interviews had taken place, as part of the evaluation questionnaire, participants were asked to rate the likelihood of change occurring. At the end of the workshop, an informal discussion took place with the designated LAC teacher, to further explore the potential for change and the AI process in general.

- LAC reported it was largely unlikely that any change would occur as a result of the research, with a mean rating 4.3 out of 10 (with 1 being very unlikely, 10 being very likely).

- In comparison, school staff rated the likelihood of change higher with a mean score of 6.5 out of 10 (with 1 being very unlikely, 10 being very likely).
- Following the workshop the designated LAC teacher reported the feedback was 'useful' in terms of reassurance that good practice was happening regularly within the school setting. The actions developed were perceived to be 'achievable' and 'meaningful' and a genuine commitment to action was conveyed.

#### **5.14.4. RESEARCH DIARY**

Through thematic analysis of the research diary two key themes emerged which were pertinent to the final design and destiny phase of the 4-D cycle and the likelihood of change. Each theme is detailed in the following sections.

##### **5.14.4.i. IMPLEMENTATION OF AI**

Initially, the researcher had envisaged that the workshop would be an energetic and dynamic experience, utilising a range of participants and senior leaders within the school, to celebrate successes and inspire action. In reality, this was not the case and the workshop was attended by the designated LAC teacher and the researcher only. However, the workshop was more successful than anticipated due to the commitment to change demonstrated by the designated LAC teacher.

It was also noted at the start of the workshop that some of the AI terminology was not readily accepted, predominantly 'provocative propositions'. This terminology was dismissed and the phrase 'mission statement' was favoured. The designated LAC teacher also conveyed a greater interest in the research findings, rather than the methodological processes.

##### **5.14.4.ii. COMMITMENT TO CHANGE**

Whilst initially disappointed that the workshop was only attended by the designated LAC teacher and the researcher, during the course of the session the designated LAC teacher appeared increasingly engaged with the research findings. As a consequence of this, actions were suggested as a natural by-

product of the discourse, and the designated LAC teacher appeared to genuinely take responsibility for actions. In some instances actions involved the designated LAC teacher taking findings back to other members of school staff and exploring further actions. At the end of the session the findings had been fully embraced and it was clarified that the researcher could return to school to further disseminate the research findings to the wider school population.

### **5.15. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS**

This thesis aimed to identify the key factors which have the greatest positive impact on the school experience of LAC, in secondary schools, through the use of AI. In doing so a number of core themes have been identified including: effective adult support, engaging learning opportunities, rewarding school systems, a safe and secure environment, good quality relationships, and normalising the school experience (section 5.3). A number of supplementary themes were also identified including participation in PEP meeting, the importance of training, promotion of emotional well-being, and core qualities were identified which contribute to effective staff teams (section 5.9).

This thesis also aimed to explore the efficacy of AI as a research tool, for work with both LAC and school staff. Data from IPA, participant evaluations, and the research diary, identified AI achieved what it purported to as a data collection tool. AI is an interactive interview experience, which considers a range of positively affirmed views and pays due consideration to participant concerns. It is also likely that this approach will enable a number of changes within the school setting as a result of this research. These findings will be further explored in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

### 6.1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis aimed to identify the key factors which have the greatest positive impact on the school experience of LAC, in secondary schools, through the use of AI. AI challenges traditional problem-orientated approaches through its strongly affirmative focus; AI aims to discover the ‘best of what is’ within an organisation utilising the voice of all stakeholders and it seeks to build on existing strengths and successes to create positive change.

A systematic literature review identified a total of 23 papers internationally, which detailed the use of AI within the field of education. Of those papers only three explored the use of AI with ‘at-risk’ populations and only seven papers utilised children as stakeholders. To date, AI has not been used with the LAC population or the professionals who work with them. This thesis therefore sought to explore the efficacy of AI as a tool for research and development with both LAC and school staff, and in doing so it also sought to explore the likelihood of AI in creating change within the secondary school.

Four research questions were proposed:

1. Through the use of appreciative inquiry, what factors are identified within the chosen secondary school, as having the greatest positive impact on the school experience of looked after children?
2. Is appreciative inquiry a valuable and effective research tool for working with looked after children?
3. Is appreciative inquiry a valuable and effective research tool for working with school staff?
4. How likely is AI to be effective, within the chosen secondary school, in creating change?

Thematic analysis identified six core themes which have the greatest positive impact on the school experience of LAC. These themes were: effective adult support, engaging learning opportunities, rewarding school systems, a safe and secure environment, good quality relationships, and normalising the school experience. A number of supplementary themes were also identified including: participation in PEP meetings, the importance of staff training, the importance of promoting emotional well-being, and the core qualities of an effective staff team were identified.

At a simplistic level the breadth of themes identified demonstrates the efficacy of AI as a research methodology. This is further supported by data from interactional process analysis (IPA), evaluation questionnaires, and research diary entries. AI was found to be a largely interactive data collection tool which identifies a range of positively affirmed views, and the positive core of the school organisation, whilst paying consideration to participant concerns. It is also highly likely a number of changes will occur within the school setting as a result of this research.

This chapter further explores the research findings in greater detail before considering the strengths and limitations of this research. In the final chapter consideration will be paid to the implications of this research for educational psychology practice and areas for further research.

## **6.2. THE ACHIEVEMENT OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

As previously identified there are ongoing concerns regarding the academic achievement of LAC (section 2.4.2). For example, LAC are less likely to achieve 5 A\*-C grades at GCSE and are more likely to experience special educational needs (DCSF, 2008a, 2009c).

During the course of this research participants were asked to define achievement to ascertain if this aligned with the national indicators of GCSE outcomes. Whilst LAC recognised the importance of academic outcomes, no reference was made to the number of GCSEs they would have to achieve within the A\*-C category. Instead LAC recognised the importance of reaching

their academic potential and the longer term outcomes i.e. achieving grades that enabled them to attend the school sixth form provision or further education settings. Non-academic based achievements were also identified such as gaining school based rewards i.e. driving lessons.

These findings were mirrored in the definitions of achievement offered by school staff. Again, achievement was defined as the child fulfilling their academic potential and reaching short-term targets, rather than obtaining a specific number of GCSE grades. Reference was also made to non-academic based achievements; achievement was conceptualised as the LAC being fully included in all aspects of school life, that the child developed and maintained peer relationships, and, that the child maintained their school placement for the duration of their school career (i.e. they were not subject to school exclusions).

Achievement for LAC can therefore be conceptualised as a flexible construct which considers both academic and non-academic based successes; this concurs with the recognition that school is an environment where both academic and social development occurs (Gilligan, 2002). This also concurs with the findings of Coulling (2000) who defined educational success by three main indicators: 1) sociability, the development of social skills and inclusion within the school community, 2) maintaining a regular pattern on attendance and 3) the child reaching their potential.

### **6.3. FACTORS FACILITATING SCHOOL SUCCESS**

Thematic analysis of the research interviews identified a range of core themes which have the greatest positive impact on the school experience of LAC; the themes of adult support, engaging learning opportunities, a safe and secure environment and good quality relationships in particular will be further discussed in the following sections.

#### **6.3.1 EFFECTIVE ADULT SUPPORT**

Effective adult support within schools was a core theme; it was recognised there must be a compatible fit between key members of school staff and LAC,

and ideally, there should be two or three key staff members who know the child well to avoid the child having to unnecessarily repeat information. Support was perceived to be most effective when it was reliable, consistent, and responsive to the needs of the child, and when there were clear rules and boundaries. A number of authors have cited the importance of adult support in facilitating the development of LAC (i.e. Kendall, et al., 2004; Martin & Jackson, 2002; Sempik et al., 2008) and these findings also concur with those of the DCSF (2009b) which emphasises support should be consistent, personalised, and provided by an identified adult who demonstrates understanding, advice, support, high expectations and conveys feelings of value.

These findings also emphasise the importance of support for both academic and pastoral needs. A number of supportive members of school staff were identified, within school, with a variety of job roles, including teaching assistants (TAs), form tutors, learning mentors and personalised academic tutors. It is interesting to note that no specific reference was made to the role of the designated LAC teacher, however, this may well be a reflection of the recent change of staffing within the organisation.

Relationships with TAs were in some cases conceptualised as 'friendships' and the TA was perceived to have a multifaceted role, providing a nurturing parental role alongside academic support and promoting self-organisation skills. Importantly this support was deemed most effective when it was empowering, enabling and discrete. Over recent years the number of TAs employed in schools has increased. Key roles and responsibilities involve supporting teachers and the curriculum, providing direct learning support, direct pastoral support and indirect pupil support; work can be general or targeted in its nature (Alborz, Pearson, Farrell, & Howes, 2009). Importantly, part of the TAs role is to equip children with the skills to become independent learners and to become less reliant on adult support (McVittie, 2005). TAs have a key role in supporting children with behavioural, emotional, and social difficulties, and TA support is a key factor in facilitating effective inclusion (Groom & Rose, 2005). In order to fulfil this role, it is essential the TA is



equipped with appropriate knowledge of policies and legislation, teamed with a good understanding of the child and the context within which they work (Heardman, et al., 2009).

Particular reference was also made to the provision of learning mentor support; mentors were perceived as trustworthy and supportive, offering flexible support dependant on the needs of the child, relating to both academic and pastoral needs. It is reported that since learning mentors were introduced in schools they have had a crucial role in engaging pupils with their education, breaking down barriers to learning and providing personalised support (Rose & Doveston, 2008). The learning mentor is tasked in supporting children with a diverse range of needs; this may include the development of learning skills and personal organisation, social issues and peer relationships, or overcome behaviour difficulties, disengagement, and even issues within the child's wider functioning i.e. within the home environment (Rose & Doveston, 2008). The learning mentor therefore acts as a role model, an active listener, an encourager and a guide, ultimately providing a supportive network for the child (DfES, 2001). With specific reference to supporting LAC, it is advocated mentors should provide support for academic, emotional, and behavioural development, work collaboratively with children to resolve problems, and, facilitate the child's movement to independence (DCSF, 2009g). Research concerning the efficacy of the learning mentor indicates positive findings; learning mentors can facilitate positive relationships (Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarupa, 2002), can encourage change in the attitudes and behaviour of children at risk of becoming disaffected (Rose & Jones, 2007), and can positively influence health, well-being, and academic achievement through improving attendance and reducing exclusions (DFES, 2005).

### **6.3.2. ENGAGING LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**

Engaging learning opportunities was also a core theme to arise. Learning opportunities were perceived to be most engaging when they were flexible and personalised, i.e. through access to college courses and modified timetables, and, when opportunities were challenging and collaborative. Personal academic tutors were also acknowledged as beneficial for those

children who experience greater difficulty with particular subjects. This concurs with government recommendation that personalised tutoring should be provided for LAC as required (DCSF, 2009b).

These findings also concur with the five key principles of personalised learning advocated by Miliband (2006): there should be assessment through learning to identify learning needs, effective teaching and learning strategies, curriculum choice which engages and respects pupils, radical approaches to school and classroom organisation, and support within the community to promote progress within schools. It is also advocated that schools should develop their educational provision around the needs, interests, and aptitudes of pupils, to promote engagement and raise standards and to ensure every child is achieving the highest level possible; all children must be stretched in their learning through creative approaches which accommodate a variety of learning styles. In order to achieve this children should be given opportunities for additional support, alternative curricular pathways, and work-related provision (Sebba, Brown, Steward, & Galton, 2007).

Failure to accelerate learning and poor quality schools have been identified as key factors in the underachievement of LAC (Axford, 2008; Goddard, 2000). Teachers are deemed most successful when they are enthusiastic, knowledgeable and confident (DCSF, 2008c). All children need opportunities to access learning opportunities which are engaging and meaningful and the 'quality first approach' to teaching aims to engage and support all children with their learning; school staff should therefore have a good understanding of the needs of the child and their cognitive abilities (Daniel & Wassall, 2002), Scruggs & Mastropieri (2004) acknowledge that a substantial proportion of learning at secondary level is accessed through textbooks which poses a challenge for any children who experience difficulties accessing written texts; thus increasing the risk of failure to learn. Therefore for learning to be effective in secondary schools it is advocated there is a need for maximised engagement, concreteness and meaningfulness, active thinking, clearly specified instructional objectives, and explicit provision of learning strategies.

Within this theme the concept of homework was also raised; generally LAC expressed a reluctance to complete homework tasks and placed little importance on doing so, unless there was a particular link with coursework or course outcomes. It has been argued that the role of homework in enhancing academic achievement is unclear (Trautwein & Köller, 2003); it is however perceived a 'quintessential' job of childhood, where after initial periods of teaching children are required to complete tasks independently (Corno & Xu, 2004). In general terms, children who are high achievers have been found to be more motivated, persistent and organised with their homework, and key variables have been identified which facilitate homework achievement including a bright environment, independent study, and parental involvement (Hong, 2001). Parents can support homework through providing structure, through facilitating understanding, and developing learning strategies (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2001); however this can provoke tensions within the home environment (Solomon, Warin, & Lewis, 2002). For LAC this support can be absent as it is reported that many professionals and carers do not perceive education to be of high importance, and, LAC are faced with additional challenges such as a lack of basic and essential resources i.e. the provision of a desk or a quiet place to sit (Francis, 2000; Martin & Jackson, 2002).

School staff also recognised that LAC can experience difficulties engaging with homework due to potentially adverse home experiences and it was advocated that opportunities to complete homework in school should be made available. This concurs with good practice reports which detail schools have delegated funds to increase educational support which includes the provision of homework clubs (Kendall, et al., 2004). This challenge is recognised at a national level and innovate projects have been piloted such as 'The Letterbox Club' which targets literacy and numeracy skills in KS2 through homework parcels (Griffiths, 2005).

Whilst the importance of rewarding school systems was raised as an individual theme, this will be mentioned as a final point within this section. It is important to note that LAC were particularly motivated by school based reward systems and the potential for rewards such as free driving lessons.

When we consider ways of engaging LAC with learning this is a key opportunity. Reward based systems also have wider implications in terms of developing a positive self-concept and facilitating a sense of achievement. These systems therefore should be utilised by school staff in a way that is meaningful to the LAC.

The key message here is the importance of providing engaging and meaningful learning and homework opportunities for LAC, linked with school rewards. The findings concur with the recent guidance issued on promoting attainment in secondary schools which emphasises the importance of promoting personalised learning, identifying educational needs and barriers to learning, recorded in personal education plans, and schools are urged to balance high levels of support with real challenge (DCSF, 2009d).

### **6.3.3. A SAFE AND SECURE ENVIRONMENT**

Another core theme was the importance of school as a place of safety and security; this was defined by physical characteristics of the school, the whole school ethos, and the belief that school was a place where the child could take safe risks.

Schools have a responsibility under the Health and Safety Act (HMSO, 1974) to provide information, instruction, training and supervision to ensure the school environment is a safe environment for both adults and children. Schools are responsible for conducting risk assessments which encompass the range of activities provided, the overall teaching and learning environment, specific areas of the building, specific times of the school day and the school year, to identify potential hazards and to be prepared for eventualities (Griffin, 2002).

However, attention has moved beyond the concept of physical safety and the importance of school as an emotionally safe environment has been advocated, as some children are dependent on the school environment for their emotional well-being (Koplow, 2002). Relating back to the earlier review of attachment theories the provision of a secure base is essential to allow children to develop and explore the world (section 2.2.3.i.). The importance of home as a secure

base has already been explored and placement instability is a significant concern amongst the LAC population (section 2.3.1); care placements are most successful when there is availability, sensitivity, acceptance, cooperation and membership (Ward, 2004). Whilst it is beyond the remit of school staff to promote changes within care settings it is possible to provide a school environment which offers these characteristics; it is particularly important that LAC experience a secure base within school to compensate for their potentially adverse experiences within the home (Walker, 2008).

It is recognised that for many children school provides a place of safety and consistency, however, for some children it may be a place of victimisation and persistent challenges; school staff can however create a secure base through predictable routines, trusting relationships with adults, and providing a welcoming environment for the child and their extended family (Daniel & Wassall, 2002). This can be further facilitated through a whole school approach focusing on the promotion of well-being (Geddes, 2006).

#### **6.3.4. GOOD QUALITY RELATIONSHIPS**

Good quality relationships were also identified as a core theme, defined by both peer relationships and the relationships between school and carers. The importance of relationships between schools and carers was a strong theme, in particular, the importance of clear communication and consistent boundaries. The importance of this is highlighted through the emphasis this a key role for the designated LAC (DCSF, 2009f); this research provides further evidence that this is a key area for schools to develop to enhance the school experience of LAC.

In terms of peer relationships children reported that friendships contributed to a positive school atmosphere; friends were most valued when they were fun, trustworthy and helpful. Peer relationships have previously been identified as a protective factor in terms of resiliency (McAdama & Mirza, 2009) and the development of peer relationships are thought to suffer as a consequence of the difficulties faced by the LAC (Robson & Briant, 2009). Peer relationships promote a sense of belonging within schools, providing further security within

the school, and offer support through times of challenge (Hamm & Faircloth, 2005). Poor peer relationships in childhood are thought to lead to an increased risk of problems in adolescence, particularly in terms of interpersonal skills and school related difficulties i.e. truancy (Woodward & Fergusson, 2000).

School staff and children also raised the concept of normalising the school experience to help LAC 'fit in'. Whilst this was raised a key theme, this will be acknowledged here for the purposes of this discussion. LAC and school staff recognised that there are benefits in 'normalising' the school experiences for, in particular, not singling LAC out and making them feel different from their peers. This research emphasises the importance of empowering the child to make successful peer relationships to feel accepted within the school community. Aligned with this, school staff identified a responsibility to support children in developing their peer relationships and social skills. This concurs with earlier research which advocates within schools there should be interventions to support both academic and social development (DCSF, 2009g, 2009h).

#### **6.4. SUPPLEMENTARY THEMES**

During the AI interviews a range of supplementary themes were also identified; these themes are referred to as 'supplementary' as they were either themes that were raised by two participants and could not be triangulated across the data sets, or, they were themes raised by school staff only. These themes are discussed in the following sections.

##### **6.4.1. PARTICIPATION IN PEP MEETINGS**

LAC and school staff recognised the value of PEP meetings. LAC perceived PEP meetings as an opportunity for feedback and joint problem solving; they felt supported in PEP meetings and felt that their views were valued. School staff emphasised the usefulness of PEP meetings as an effective means for 'monitoring' LAC.

The PEP is ultimately the responsibility of the social worker; however this is a shared document which contains key information to ensure the child can access the provisions required in school, and the designated teacher has a key role implementing actions within school and ensuring educational targets are monitored (DCSF, 2009f). This concurs with the findings here which emphasise the value of PEPs for monitoring purposes. Hayden (2005) advocates that one of the main ways we can promote educational outcomes is through better educational planning and this is facilitated through the implementation of personal educational plans which are perceived as an integral part of the care plan; in doing so this has had a positive impact in raising the profile of educational needs.

The implementation of PEPs has not been an easy task due to difficulties with staffing and workload, and there have also been concerns about the 'appropriateness' of plans; however this is seen as a core strategic activity which provides an opportunity to hear the voice of the child (Fletcher-Campbell, Archer, & Tomlinson, 2003). The findings here offered by LAC were positive which concur with the views reported earlier of Thomas & O'Kane (1999, section 2.6.1) who identified PEP meetings provided an opportunity to be heard, to receive information about their care or educational situation, and to hear what adults have to say. There were no negative reports of children feeling exposed or embarrassed.

#### **6.4.2. A STAFF TEAM WORKING AT ITS BEST**

Throughout the course of AI interviews with school staff, key characteristics were identified which facilitate the optimum functioning of the staff team. This included trustworthy relationships, good communication, consistently high expectations, and personal characteristics such as open-mindedness, optimism, non-confrontational attitudes, and a consistently calm approach.

The factors identified by school staff fit succinctly within the existing literature base. For example, Parker (2008) identified 12 characteristics of an effective team including: clear purpose, informality, participation, good listening, civilised disagreements, consensus decisions, open communication

and trust, clear roles, development of external relationships, shared leaderships, diversity, and self-assessment. Whilst school staff reported they were working well together as a team, AI provided an opportunity to reflect on practice and to consider any further actions required to enhance the vitality of the staff team. Whilst this research was framed within the context of promoting the school experience for LAC it is important to recognise there are wider benefits of effective staff teams such as increased motivation, creativity and power (Turner, 2001), shared expertise and skills, joint decision making, and mutual support (Bell, 1992); it is possible these characteristics may be enhanced through this opportunity for reflection.

The importance of staff training was also highlighted; this was particularly pertinent for the designated LAC teacher, which aligns with statutory requirements (DCSF, 2009f). This was important in terms of keeping up to date with policy developments and understanding legislation, and the benefits of well trained staff teams are recognised.

#### **6.4.3. PROMOTING EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING**

School staff recognised the importance of promoting self-esteem and self-confidence, challenging negative perceptions, and developing problem-solving skills. The negative outcomes associated with poor mental health have been discussed elsewhere (section 2.2.1) and studies have reported that children feel that are ‘stigmatized’ for being in care and children have demonstrated concerns regarding additional labels such as ‘mental illness’ (Blower, et al., 2004), or in this instance a ‘statement’ of SEN. It is positive to see that school staff acknowledge the importance of promoting emotional well-being. Guidance for schools working with LAC highlight there should be a range of intervention strategies to address both social and academic needs (DCSF, 2009d).

From a theoretical perspective, these findings relate to the earlier literature pertaining to resiliency (section 2.2.3.ii) which identifies the importance of developing emotional literacy skills (DCSF, 2008b) and developing positive values, social competences, and talents and interests (Daniel & Wassall,



2002). Within schools in general, there is an emphasis on developing skills within this area under the umbrella of '*social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL)*'. The SEAL programme is a whole school initiative to promote social and emotional skills, which underpins effective learning, behaviour, attendance, positive relationships, and emotional health (DfES, 2007).

It is also important to mention here, that whilst much of the literature identifies the academic shortcomings of LAC of missing out on a wholesome school life, it is important to acknowledge that there are wider implications, in particular, the development of peer relationships, access to personal, social and health education, and the development of social skills and emotional well-being (Knight et al., 2006), which should be equally regarded.

#### **6.5. SUMMARY: FACTORS FACILITATING SUCCESS**

Through the use of AI six core themes were identified which have the greatest positive impact on the school experience of LAC in secondary school. These include the importance of effective adult support, engaging learning opportunities, rewarding school systems, feelings of safety and security, good quality relationships and normalising the school experience. A number of supplementary themes were also identified including participation in PEP meetings, the core factors of an effective team and the importance of staff training, and the promotion of emotional well-being.

The themes identified here fit saliently within the existing literature base and especially with the recent guidance to promote attainment in secondary schools issued by the DCSF (2009g). Through the identification of the core themes, and the positive core of the organisation, a number of actions were agreed which will enable the school to build upon these successes. It is hoped that through enhancing the school experience there may be subsequent improvements in academic achievement.

It can also be concluded that AI generates rich data which is meaningful to the organisation and grounded in 'real' examples as AI has provided time for

participants to reflect on their experiences and to identify their strengths at a personal and organisational level.

## **6.6. THE EFFICACY OF AI WITHIN EDUCATION**

Empirical research has demonstrated the efficacy of AI particularly within organisational and healthcare settings (e.g. Carter, 2006b; Reed et al., 2005; van Vuuren & Crous, 2005) and whilst AI is growing in popularity (Dick, 2004) there is a clear gap in the literature which demonstrates the application of AI within the field of education. The systematic literature review (section 3.6.) identified only 23 peer-reviewed studies, internationally, which detailed the use of AI within the field of education. Whilst these applications have been broad and demonstrated the flexibility of AI methodology there were only three studies which detailed the use of AI within school settings to support groups of 'at-risk' pupils (Calabrese, et al., 2005; Calabrese, et al., 2007; Ryan, et al., 1999). Whilst the authors of these studies advocate the efficacy of AI, these studies have only included education staff and 'at-risk' children have not been recruited as stakeholders. This thesis therefore provided an opportunity to explore the efficacy of AI with LAC and school staff, within the secondary school setting.

In the most basic sense, AI can be conceptualised as an effective research tool given the broad range of themes detailed in the previous sections. The findings from the interactional process analysis, participant evaluations, and the research diary themes, provide further evidence to support the use of AI within education whilst highlighting the associated challenges; these findings will be explored in the following sections.

## **6.7. AI AND LAC**

Within the following sections the efficacy of AI with LAC will be explored; particular consideration will be paid to the efficacy of the AI interview before reflecting on the challenges posed in terms of engagement and recruitment. Attention will then be paid to the efficacy of AI with school staff before considering general issues pertaining to AI in practice.

### **6.7.1. THE AI INTERVIEW**

It has been widely acknowledged that LAC should contribute to decision making processes and service development (Axford, 2008; Clarke, et al., 2003; Martin & Jackson, 2002) but unfortunately LAC are too often excluded from participating in such opportunities (Davies & Wright, 2008; McLeod, 2007). However, it is recognised that young people are experts in their own learning (Carnell, 2005) and through listening to the child's views we are able to clarify our understanding of the child's needs; LAC have valuable contributions to make to research (Kufeldt, Simard, & Vachon, 2003). This unique perspective can inform teachers and professionals regarding the ways in which services can become more focused upon addressing pupil needs and thereby becoming more effective (Rose & Jones, 2007). It is important such participation is achieved in a meaningful way and this section will consider the use of AI as a data collection tool.

IPA analysis of the AI interviews with LAC indicated that this was largely an interactive experience and participants felt that had been listened to. The most frequent modes of exchange used by the LAC were giving positive information, agreement, and giving neutral information. Positive information was shared in relation to the core themes identified; through dialogue regarding peak experience and identifying those occasions when the school is working at its best. In many parts of the interview children gave factual information, for example, information regarding the school reward scheme or commentary during the drawing activity and it is not possible to infer whether this information is positive or negative. It is also important to note that LAC were able to share negative information during the course of the interview, which largely related to reports of bullying, friendships that had ended, and perceptions and attitudes towards homework. These concerns were acknowledged and explored before redirecting attention back to the positive aspects of inquiry. LAC regularly communicated their agreement with information summaries or when the researcher checked their understanding of information shared. The most frequent affective category was laughter; categories such as irritation, gratitude, apology, and concern, were not evident within any of the interviews with LAC, which is perhaps indicative of

the application of the MIPS model to a research interview rather than a medical interaction.

The predominant modes of exchange used by the researcher were open questions, closed questions, and summarising. Whilst the semi-structured interview utilised a core set of open-question, LAC required a high level of further questions and prompts reflected by the high number of open and closed questions used, which concurs with reports suggesting children respond better to directive and structured questions (Morrison & Anders, 2001). It is also important to note that during the initial stages of the interview it was important to give reassurance and further information to the participant predominantly related to the drawing task. During the course of the interview neutral information was also shared, for example, during dialogue regarding career aspirations. At points within the interview it was also deemed appropriate to give positive information, particularly in terms of acknowledging the quality of responses given which also facilitated rapport building. The analysis also indicated a core role for the researcher in summarising the interview content, checking understanding and clarifying information which are key functions within good communication.

In many respects the AI interview appeared effective as all LAC reported they felt listened to and they found the interview to be an enjoyable experience. More specifically it can be concluded that AI interviews demonstrated qualities of an effective interview as proposed by Kvale (1996, see section 4.13.2), for example, the presence of spontaneous, rich, specific, and relevant answers from the interviewee. This was most evident during story-telling focusing on peak experiences (further discussed in section 6.10.2). IPA data did however indicate that the mean utterance duration of the interviewer was longer than the response from the LAC and accounted for a considerable proportion of the interview. Whilst this does present some challenge to the use of AI, it has been argued that AI should be seen as an interactive dialogical approach rather than an interview and with LAC this was essential. The challenges of engaging LAC in AI are discussed in the following section.

### 6.7.2. THE CHALLENGES OF AI WITH LAC

During the course of this research a number of challenges were identified in the implementation of AI with LAC relating to participant engagement and the ability to foster creative thinking. These challenges warrant further consideration and are discussed further below.

Whilst IPA has previously been discussed, there is one important factor that should not be overlooked; this data highlights individual differences in terms of the ability to engage with the semi-structured interview process as some children contributed considerably more information than others. Even the use of directive and structured questions did not necessarily facilitate free-flowing dialogue. It has been suggested that groups of individuals can be reluctant to engage with interviews, for example, participants who are being asked about sensitive information, participants who are perceived to be advantaged within society, and, participants who are perceived disadvantaged (Adler & Adler, 2001). It is also reported that children who have experienced adversity are more likely to experience difficulties in thinking, in naming and communicating their feelings, and communicating their wishes and desires (Golding, Dent, Nissim, & Stott, 2006). Future research should consider methods of enhancing engagement such as preparation activities before the in-depth interview, or, familiarisation with the interviewer (Jones, 2003). It was also felt, at times, that the research interview appeared to be going 'off subject', however we must be willing to accept that interviews with LAC, as with any children, can go off course and we should simply accept this discomfort and loss of control over the interview agenda (McLeod, 2007).

Conducting AI with LAC did also pose a challenge in terms of facilitating creative, independent thinking, particularly for more abstract questions such as future wishes. There were also difficulties during the identification of themes and the development of provocative propositions, however, these are perhaps higher order research skills and it would be unfair to expect children to achieve this on their own. It is important to note that there were benefits of completing these tasks collaboratively as this enabled member checking to ensure the reliability and validity of findings, and, it provided an opportunity

for children to clarify and further expand on information they had already shared.

#### **6.7.2.i. RECRUITMENT OF LAC**

Heptinstall (2000), previously referenced, identified key challenges when conducting research with LAC, in particular, high attrition rates and difficulties obtaining consent for participation, attributed to the child's current difficulties, or, adults 'protecting' children from potential adverse affects. Whilst this is not specific to AI, it is important to reflect on the recruitment challenges faced.

Of the four LAC identified as potential participants there were challenges in the recruitment of half of the sample. Two of the consent forms were returned promptly as incidentally two of the LAC had the same social worker, who also showed a genuine interest in the research. Obtaining consent for the other two children was more problematic.

For one child, who was not recruited to the research, there were considerable difficulties making contact with the social worker. In accordance with the research methodology information letters were sent by both post and email, however there was no response to these requests. Despite follow up telephone calls, messages and emails, it was not possible to engage the social worker in any form of dialogue. The senior social worker, who had initially been involved in the planning of the project, agreed to contact the social worker on the researcher's behalf but despite all efforts the social worker failed to respond to any communications and this was attributed to workload pressures and legal duties.

For another child, who was later recruited to the research, concerns were raised by school staff concerning the 'suitability' of the child. This child was perceived too vulnerable to engage with the research due to ongoing changes within the care setting; this child had been living with adoptive carers for a significant time period and this had recently broken down and the child was moving to an alternative care setting. Once the child was settled in their new

placement, the designated LAC teacher made contact with the child and carers to ascertain their interest in the research and participation was readily agreed.

Whilst this thesis is only a small scale study, the two examples highlight the challenges of recruitment that are encountered when researching with LAC; these appear to be generic difficulties that bear no relationship to the research methodology. However, both of these children had a right to participate in this research and this should not be obstructed through barriers in communication; fortunately one child was afforded the opportunity to participate, however, the other child lost their opportunity to be heard. The difficulties communicating with the social worker, in this instance, may be a one off and it is acknowledged that there are significant time and workload demands (Garrett, 2008). However, As applied psychologists it is our responsibility to overcome these recruitment challenges to ensure the voice of the LAC is heard (Hall, 1996).

### **6.7.3. SUMMARY: AI AND LAC**

It can be concluded that AI with LAC was an interactive, dialogical method which achieved its aims as a research tool; in particular this research highlights the strengths of narrative approaches to research which warrants further consideration. Positively affirmed views and concerns were raised within the framework. There were challenges of engaging LAC in the AI interview in terms of facilitating dialogue and creative thinking, and, there were some difficulties with participant recruitment. This research has however, provided an opportunity for the voice of the LAC to be heard at an organisational level.

### **6.8. AI AND SCHOOL STAFF**

In the following sections the efficacy of AI with school staff will be further explored. In particular, consideration will be paid to the efficacy of AI as an interview tool and the challenges posed, in terms of time constraints and participant engagement.

### **6.8.1. THE AI INTERVIEW**

IPA indicates that AI with school staff achieved its aims as an effective tool for data collection; it allowed the researcher to ask specific questions and enabled participants to share their views and experiences. Participants reported they felt listened to and that they were able to discuss both their success and their concerns within the AI interview.

The predominant modes of exchange used by the school staff were sharing of positive information, negative information, and neutral information. Throughout the course of the interview school staff conveyed positive information concerning the core themes identified (section 5.3) and school based approaches which increase engagement and maximise achievement. There were some occasions when neutral information was shared and this was largely factual information, for example, relating to the child's educational history or placement location, and it was not possible to infer whether this was positive or negative. This concurs with the IPA from LAC interviews.

Throughout the interviews there were numerous occasions where school staff identified challenges and raised their concerns regarding the school experience of LAC. This included concerns pertaining to instability, disruptive schooling, poor communication between professionals, the challenges of implementing a consistent approach between home and school, the challenges of managing disruptive behaviour, and, a range of within-child difficulties were cited such as low levels of emotional maturity, low self-esteem and self-confidence, feelings of worthlessness, difficulties accepting praise, and the risk of exclusion. Concerns were also raised regarding the transition from school to further education and the perceived lack of support. With school staff it was apparent that there was a tendency to focus on problems and there was a greater need for positive reframing. This concurs with the suggestion that professionals spend a significant proportion of time justifying poor outcomes; AI can hopefully be a first step in challenging these ways of thinking and shifting focus to achievements and successes.



The most common affective category was laughter and categories such as irritation, gratitude, apology, and concern were not evident, providing further support that these characteristics are more prevalent within medical interactions than the research interview.

During the AI interviews with staff, the most common modes of exchange utilised by the researcher were open questions, registering information, and summarising. This contrasts with the most common modes used when interviewing LAC as school staff were more able to freely donate information in response to open questions and further prompts were not necessary. At times it was necessary to empathise and acknowledge the difficulties school staff experienced and to provide positive information to acknowledge the progress made and achievements of school staff. The role of summarising and registering information are key functions within interviews.

#### **6.8.2. THE CHALLENGES OF AI WITH SCHOOL STAFF**

The following section will consider the main challenges encountered when implementing AI with school staff within the secondary school. This will focus in particular on time constraint and how the origins of this research may impact on participant engagement.

##### **6.8.2.i TIME CONSTRAINTS**

Within this research the main barrier to participation was the time constraints imposed and this restricted the opportunity for group interviews and the general implementation of AI. This experience was considerably different from the experience of Willoughby & Tosey (2007), who conducted AI at a whole school level with a variety of stakeholders; considerable amounts of time were available for this research, for example, a whole day workshop was planned for the group to analyse data and to create visions for the future. There are a number of possible explanations for this finding which will be explored in the following sections.

Firstly, it is acknowledged that action research approaches, such as AI, are subject to competing demands due to the high level of collaboration that is

required (Robson, 2007). In future research it would be useful to elicit a more formal commitment from all participants and clarify expectation of participants before, during, and after the research cycle (Cooperrider and Whitney (2007).

Secondly, the newly appointed designated LAC teacher conveyed a reluctance to place additional demands on the school staff team, at a personal level due to recent changes in staffing, and, partly due to the additional time costs. It is well acknowledged that there are high demands on teaching staff due to the time pressures, administrative and assessment requirements, which could potentially form a barrier to engagement with optional activities such as research; however this arguably should be a decision for individual staff members to make rather than a decision which is made for them. Future research could overcome the barrier by considering methods of engaging and communicating within the setting as a whole rather than through a key member of staff. Further applications of AI within well established teams is also required to explore the potential impact the recent change in staffing had.

#### **6.8.2.ii. ORIGINS OF THE RESEARCH**

Whilst the time barriers were a significant issue throughout this research it is also important to reflect on the origins of this research project and how this may impact participant engagement. It is widely advocated that AI should begin with problem-holders and during these initial discussions the research area should be defined and negotiated. Within this research the LA LAC team were the initial problem holders and upon reflection, it would be interesting to ascertain how this research would have been embraced if the school had initially been approached as the problem-holders to define the areas of inquiry; there may have been greater engagement and greater time available. However, school staff were given opportunities to 'shape' the research design during the initial meeting and no suggestions or amendments were proposed. However, other successful applications of AI have conducted initial meetings and negotiated the research design directly with school staff, for example, Cullen and Ramoutar (2003) detailed initial meetings between the EPs,

Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher, the school SENCo, and class teacher. In the case of Willoughby and Tosey (2007) this research was instigated due to the Headteacher's interest on AI; this obviously has implications in terms of staff commitment, engagement, and the perceived importance of the research project. As a final thought, it is interesting to note that the Headteacher chose not to participate in this research even though the Headteacher was the initial point of contact during the planning of this research; all communication was delegated to the designated LAC teacher. Within AI it is advocated that leaders should champion AI and participate as an equal and essential voice, even if they do not form part of the core research team (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2007). It is also well documented that the involvement of the most senior team leaders demonstrates support for change within the setting and also communicates the importance of the research which can be particularly influential during the early stages of recruitment (Christie, 2006). The implications are important to consider in light of the potential for future research.

### **6.8.3. SUMMARY: AI AND SCHOOL STAFF**

It can be concluded that the AI interview was equally effective with school staff as it was with LAC. Again, the approach was interactive and the participants were able to freely generate rich data; both positive views and concerns were raised. School staff were more inclined to discuss their concerns and there was a greater need for positive reframing. The main challenges faced within this research are those pertaining to time constraints and issues around engagement, which were reflected upon in terms of ownership for the research. AI however demonstrates great potential for applications with school settings and further research is required in this area.

### **6.9. SUMMARY: AI AND EDUCATION - A LEARNING OPPORTUNITY**

The previous sections have explored the efficacy of AI specifically in relation to LAC and school staff and with both groups AI has been an interactive and effective tool for research and development (summarised in sections 6.7.3 and 6.8.3).

It is also important to reflect on this thesis as a learning opportunity for exploring both the applicability of AI and how to make the processes accessible and concrete, and, the challenges of implementing AI in the real world of education and the unique strengths.

Firstly, the research detailed here depicts a concrete framework for implementing AI which can be applied in further research, achievable through the specific methodology used and how this clearly fits within the 4-D cycle. Whilst there is an evolving literature base describing the use of AI numerous accounts are lacking detailed methodology. Extensive reading was required to clearly understand the implementation of AI and whilst this reading indicates there is a commonality of research methods used (as detailed in table 4.1) this research hopefully provides an accessible and replicable example of AI for practitioners. Arguably, novice AI researchers would benefit from a 'how to' guide clearly detailing AI methodology but hopefully this research provides some clarity in this area.

In the previous sections a number of logistical constraints regarding the implementation of AI within a secondary school setting were identified which are important to bear in mind in future research. These are summarised in the table overleaf:

CHALLENGES TO AI	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
Challenges of engaging LAC in AI interviews and facilitating creative, independent thinking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider the use of preparation activities for participants.</li> <li>• Consider the possibility of ‘paired’ interviews if interviewee feels uncomfortable during group interviews.</li> <li>• Ask young people who are participating what the best compromise would be.</li> </ul>
Time constraints and restricted group work opportunities including the final workshop session.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the outset of the research formalise a contract for participation. This could specify the time and meeting commitments to be honoured by both the participants and the interviewer.</li> </ul>
Origins of research.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To encourage active participation it would be advantageous to involve members of school staff in the initial ‘define’ stage, alongside members of the LA, to facilitate a shared sense of ownership.</li> </ul>
Bringing participants together.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be mindful of safe opportunities to bring together participant groups. I.e. during the ‘dream’ stage or in the workshop, to inspire collaboration and change. Again, this would have to be specified at the initial negotiation stages.</li> </ul>

*Table 5.1: Challenges to AI in practice*

It is important to reiterate here that the difficulties in recruiting LAC are not specific to this research and are a general consideration for future work in this field.

Whilst these challenges are acknowledged there are a number of unique strengths which are central to the notion of AI: the affirmative focus, the strengths of the story-telling approach, and the 4-D cycle. In my view, it is these principles which enable AI to be a unique and effective tool for research and development, in particular the role of story-telling which presents a flexible and open research methodology for capturing the voice of the LAC.

#### **6.9.1. THE STRENGTHS OF AN APPRECIATIVE APPROACH**

AI has a strongly affirmative focus and it is advocated that when working with LAC we need to celebrate the good things (McGinnity, 2007) and we should be mindful of negatively labelling young people in care (Holland, 2009). Much of the research concerning LAC has emanated from a deficit perspective and AI provided the opportunity to explore this area through a new lens. The theoretical benefits of an affirmative focus have previously been detailed (see section 3.4) and this research provides further support, particularly in terms of the efficacy of the workshop (see section 6.9.1).

It was however particularly interesting to note that within one of the research interviews a member of school staff stated:

*“We have an advantage in that we’re seeing success and if we’re seeing success you believe you can do it.”*

This statement epitomises the core belief of AI and it is hoped that this affirmative experience has enhanced this belief. Further effective evaluations of AI were beyond the scope of this research, however it is hoped that this belief can be facilitated in other settings due to the affirmative method of inquiry.

#### **6.9.2. THE STRENGTHS OF STORY TELLING APPROACHES**

One of the most striking findings when reflecting upon the use of AI with LAC was the element of ‘storytelling’ and asking participants to re-live their peak experiences. The use of such non-directive questions enables the identification of unexpected findings (Reed, Jones, & Irvine, 2005) and the

diverse range of information captured here arguably would not have been achieved through alternative modes of questioning. With LAC participants this was perhaps more powerful than with school staff who experienced greater difficulty identifying specific experiences.

Storytelling approaches to research, also known as narrative approaches, enable the researcher to explore rich tacit knowledge, to facilitate an understanding of everyday life and 'real-world behaviour' (Callahan & Elliott, 1996). The use of stories opens people to humanity, it stimulates trust, enables equality, and encourages individuals to see experiences from an alternative perspective (Heierbacher, 2007). We all have stories, either from own experiences, the experiences of others, or from our interactions; it is important we understand how and where stories are produced, the nature of our stories, and how we can use this knowledge to theorise about social behaviours (Miller & Glassner, 2004).

Whilst this research provides a snapshot for the potential of narrative approaches to research with LAC, it also emphasises the need for facilitation through direct questioning within the narrative framework (Docherty & Sandelowski, 1999). However, the efficacy of narrative approaches have been demonstrated with a range of vulnerable children, for example, children who have witnessed war and abuse (Berman, 2000) and children who have experienced abuse (Hodges & Steele, 2000). Whilst some authors argue that narrative approaches to research are not clearly defined there are no clear data analysis processes, this is a high profile area of social research which can provide new layers of meaning (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008) and warrants further exploration for research with LAC. It is in my view that the distinctive aspect of AI research is the ability to draw on story-telling approaches within a structured framework.

### **6.9.3. THE 4-D CYCLE**

The final strength to reiterate is the benefits of the 4-D cycle which underpins AI, and how this provides guidance for research planning, data analysis and action planning. Whilst the appreciative interview clearly has its strengths,

the strongly affirmative focus on action and change in the design and destiny stages adds an extra dimension to the research process which makes AI more than just a qualitative positive psychology approach. Similarities can be drawn between appreciative questioning and other positive psychology approaches such as solution focused questioning; both approaches aim to identify existing strengths, to construct solutions, and there is a similarity in the questions used (i.e. the miracle question / 3 wishes question), however the purpose of each model is different. AI is a tool for organisational change and development and solution focused questioning emanates from therapy interviewing (Miller, de Shazer, & De Jong, 2001). However it is paramount to emphasise that AI is more than just the questions we ask, and research which has utilised appreciative questioning alone is arguably action research with an appreciative focus. It is the 4-D cycle and the strongly affirmative focus which makes AI an ultimately unique approach (Fitzgerald, et al., 2003).

#### **6.10. AI AND CHANGE**

The final research question which this thesis aimed to explore was the likelihood of AI in creating change within the secondary school. This will be discussed in the following section in terms of the workshop experience, and the dreams for the future, before considering the challenges in this area.

##### **6.10.1. THE WORKSHOP**

The workshop experience provided an opportunity to reflect on the research findings and to use these findings to inform future educational planning. Although initially it was disappointing to learn the only school representative attending the workshop would be the designated LAC teacher, this actually proved to be a fruitful and engaging experience.

The first three stages of the 4-D model are clearly defined in the literature, however, there is less structured information pertaining to the final design and destiny phases. Essentially this part of the research involves giving the research back to the participants and the researcher stepping back (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2001). It has previously been noted that there are a number of studies which utilise appreciative questioning and have not



followed through the 4-D cycle due to factors such as time constraints (i.e. Carnell, 2005). Having experienced the workshop firsthand the importance of this stage should not be underestimated; this workshop encouraged the designated LAC teacher to take responsibility for action planning and for creating change.

Going into the workshop there was a predetermined agenda to explore the core themes identified, to explore dreams for the future, and to then develop actions. However, over the course of this workshop the designated LAC naturally identified actions as a by-product of the ongoing dialogue rather than this being a formalised 'action planning' stage of the workshop. Findings presented within the workshop were readily accepted as they were grounded in examples and they were affirmatively orientated. This affirmative focus promotes a search for solutions (Gates, 2002) and as AI highlights the positive core within the organisation engaged in inquiry, it avoids a negative or blaming stance (Carnell, 2005). This contrasts with experiences where tensions have occurred between research outcomes and the population studied (Ragin, 2009). Whilst there are clear benefits of adopting this affirmative stance, it is recognised that with the wider context the invitation to focus on 'best moments' has the potential to disqualify the difficulties and challenges experienced (Madsen, 2009) which should be considered in future applications of AI.

If we align this with the most respected psychological models of change i.e. the 'Stages of Change Model' proposed by Prochaska and DiClemente (1982), which proposes change occurs through the following stages: precontemplative, contemplative, determinism, active change, maintenance and relapse; AI advocates a radically different experience where participants arguably advance to stages of determinism and change rapidly.

An action agreed during the workshop was for the designated LAC teacher to cascade findings and actions throughout the staff team and field notes would be available to facilitate this process. This is recognised as a key action which would further enable the continuation of the destiny stage and this is likely to

create further momentum for change. The provision of a written report, or in this instance field notes, is also likely to act as a catalyst for reflection and change. Whilst this is in itself a strength of the AI model, there are no time-limits to the destiny stage which subsequently creates difficulties when evaluating the overall AI process, as change is continuously evolving and becoming embedded in everyday practice. Findings from this workshop do however indicate a high likelihood of change.

### **6.10.2. DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE**

During the AI process all participants were given three wishes to enhance the school experience for LAC, within secondary schools. The data yielded here was diverse and broad spanning both social and educational domains (section 5.14.2). Due to the nature of the care system a number of dreams were elicited relating to the wider social situation rather than being specific to the organisational functioning. For example, some participants wished for changes in relation to placement permanency and the availability of suitable placements; staff conveyed a sense of powerlessness effecting change in the wider social area. For school staff, these dreams appeared to be of greater importance than transformation within the organisation. Some of the dreams elicited also emanated from a personal viewpoint, for example, more time for proactive work within the designated LAC role, for lessons to be more fun, and for teachers to be more lenient. In some instances professionals identified wishes relating to the continuation of good practice such as consistency, clear boundaries, good communication, and the provision of a named-key worker. The workshop considered each of these dreams and possible actions to enhance practice in these areas. The following section will however focus on the dreams elicited that relate specifically to the school organisation.

#### **6.10.2.i. PROVIDING A NURTURING PROVISION**

Through exploring the concerns pertaining to social care processes and placement stability, school staff wished for a nurturing provision at school, which could provide either overnight respite care or time out for children who are experiencing distress.

This concept of nurturing provisions raised here is aligned with the research pertaining to school based nurture groups, which build on the principles of attachment theory. Nurture groups are defined as:

*‘school based learning environments specifically designed for pupils whose difficulties in accessing school learning are underpinned by an apparent need for social and individual experiences that can be construed in terms of the unmet early learning needs.’* (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007, p. 173)

Nurture groups are designed to provide pupils who experience social, emotional and behavioural difficulties with an educational bridge to permanent and full-time placements in mainstream classrooms (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007). The classic nurture group model proposed by Boxall (2002) advocates a nurturing provision provides a highly structured, safe, welcoming and caring environment where learning can take place. There is also a home environment created within the setting to provide a secure base; this is thought to facilitate relationships with teachers and facilitate group belonging. Within the classic model a core group of children attend regular sessions and engage in a range of activities which are designed to develop trust, communication skills, and to develop self-confidence and self-esteem (Colley, 2009).

Whilst much of the literature in this area has focused on the impact of provisions for primary age people, it is now recognised that nurture groups can be effective with in secondary schools and can positively impact upon a variety of developmental strands (Cooke, Yeomans, & Parkes, 2008). However, due to financial implications and the number of children within secondary schools that would benefit from this provision, it is recognised that schools are more likely to utilise a variety of nurturing areas that support children to meet their learning, behaviour and nurturing needs.

Unfortunately transformations such as the implementation of a nurture group are beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the school suggested reviewing

the resources that are currently available and considering the ways in which existing facilities could be improved.

#### **6.10.2.ii. IMPROVING THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT**

A number of wishes proposed made reference to the physical environment of the school setting in terms of both the schools aesthetics, i.e. the need for more trees and greenery, and in terms of general comfort, i.e. the school desks and chairs provided.

This issue is one that is not specific to LAC alone. It is reported that the quality of the physical environment can influence behaviour and the external school environment in particular can impact on attendance, academic achievement, and parental engagement with school (Perpetuity Research Ltd, 2008). Earthman, (2000) advocates that the school building can influence the performance of both students and teachers and emphasises the importance of a range of features including wall colour, presence or absence of windows and air conditioning units, carpet, noise levels and furniture type. Whilst a positive relationship is reported between the environment, achievement and behaviour, it is also reported that these findings are not predictable or consistent. However other researchers equally advocate that students who are uncomfortable, or distracted by poor lighting, heating, cooling and ventilation noise, are less likely to engage with learning (Olson & Kellum, 2003).

This is also an area where the importance of consulting with children to inform developments has been overlooked and it is recognised that children may have fantastic, futuristic, and transformational ideas (Woolner, Hall, Wall, & Dennison, 2007). It was recognised within the workshop meeting that this was an area of importance to the school and efforts were constantly being made to rejuvenate parts of the school site. This research has hopefully reiterated both the importance of creating an aesthetically pleasing environment and the importance of consulting with children to inform the decision-making process.

### **6.10.2.iii. IMPROVING THE SCHOOL TRANSITION PROCESS**

The transition process from primary to secondary school was also identified as a key area for development. During the course of the interviews examples were shared where children had transferred to the secondary school and information regarding their looked after status had not been shared prior to their arrival. In contrast, transition had been most successful when meetings have taken place between the school, foster carer/s, and the social worker, and information was openly shared and clear plans were made to facilitate the transition process.

It is recognised that transition between primary and secondary school is a significant life event for all children (Lohaus, Elben, Ball, & Klein-hessling, 2004). For LAC in particular this transition period can be daunting, unsettling, and there are associated challenges in building new relationships with both peers and adults (DCSF, 2009h). West, Sweeting, & Young (2008) reiterate this point and highlight the transition phase signifies the adjustment to both new school systems and new peer systems. The authors found that children with low self-esteem and low academic ability experienced greater difficulties with school transition; children who were anxious or had previously experienced peer victimisation experienced greater difficulty during peer transition. It is also reported that poor school transition was predictive of higher levels of depression and lower levels of attainment at a later date. It is therefore essential that we support our most vulnerable children during this transition.

In order for transition between schools to be successful a range of factors have been identified including: familiarity with the new environment, developing a sense of belonging, building relationships between peers and with teachers, skill development (i.e. personal organisation and problem solving skills) and it is essential that pupils with additional needs are identified to ensure they are effectively supported (Ashton, 2008). It is advocated that transition is most successful for LAC when the child is thoroughly prepared and feels safe and secure; LAC may benefit from a gradual and staged integration, additional school visits to enhance familiarity, and early mentoring links (DCSF, 2009h).

Not only was the process perceived as important for LAC it was also recognised that this was a key time to facilitate relationships between school staff and the LAC. During the workshop actions were taken to inform thinking around the transition process in place, particularly in terms of the early identification of LAC, and consideration was paid to developing more robust systems with the school educational psychologist.

#### **6.10.2.iv. PEER MENTORING SYSTEMS**

The final wish to reflect upon was the wish for peer mentors, as an alternative forum for LAC to seek support, rather than relying on the learning mentor and other school staff members. Peer mentors are defined as people of a similar age and / or status who adopt the role of ‘mentor and mentee’ (Miller, 2002). The mentoring role is defined as:

*‘...an encouraging and supportive one-to-one relationship... characterised by positive role modelling, promotion of raised aspirations, positive reinforcement, open-ended counselling, and joint problem-solving. It is often cross-age, always fixed-role, quite often cross-institution, and often targeted to disadvantaged groups’* (Topping, 2005, p.622).

Peer mentoring therefore focuses on less structured and informal opportunities for social support (Bellini, 2006). Mentoring can also take place within small groups where the focus may be on education support (Miller, 2002) however, this is more typically referred to a peer tutoring (Topping, 2005).

A number of benefits associated with peer mentors have been identified such as low costs, ease of recruitment, and an increased positive school atmosphere, and, specific benefits for both the mentee and the mentor have been identified including an increased openness and interest in learning, increased concentration (Miller, 2002) enhanced communication skills (Maskell, 2002), increased self-esteem, social skills and behavioural competence (Karcher, 2005). The use of peer mentors has also been

advocated for a range of pupil groups including children who may have an autistic spectrum condition (Bellini, 2006), pupils who have experienced bullying (Maskell, 2002), pupils transferring from primary to secondary school (Nelson, 2003), for children who underachieve (Montgomery, 2009) and mentors are advocated to support the social inclusion of children who experience special educational needs (Miller, 2002). Outstanding practice has been highlighted where LAC mentor other LAC (Ofsted, 2009), however, there is little empirical evidence which specifically advocates the efficacy of peer mentoring schemes for LAC and there is a need for further research in this area (Britner, Balcazar, Blechman, Blinn-Pike, & Larose, 2006).

This presents an exciting opportunity for this secondary school to enhance their practise with LAC through more creative means. When implementing peer mentoring systems due attention must to be paid to the necessary training requirements and systems must be in place to ensure the mentee does not become overly dependent (Bellini, 2006). However, during the workshop session it was agreed that the existing school system would be revised and staff were keen to explore how pupils within the schools sixth form provision, who are currently trained as mentors, could be utilised to meet the needs of LAC.

### **6.10.3. CHALLENGES TO DREAMING**

At this point it is important to reflect that all participants reported that this part of the interview was the hardest section to respond to. From a LAC perspective this was partly attributed to the fact the majority of participants were reaching the end of compulsory schooling, however, when this question was reframed to consider how the experience could be improved for children in a similar situation this remained difficult to do. Some LAC reported that because their school experience was going well they could not easily identify dreams or changes they desired. School staff did not specify the reasons why they found this question the most difficult to answer. It could be hypothesised that the school perceived they were working at their best with LAC or that they placed a greater importance on transformation within the social care

system; this warrants further exploration across a variety of educational settings.

#### **6.10.4. SUMMARY: AI AND CHANGE**

It can be concluded that there is a high likelihood change will occur within the school setting; this can be largely attributed to the designated LAC teacher's engagement with the AI workshop as the affirmative focus naturally promoted a search for solutions, and, meaningful and achievable actions were agreed. Dreams for the future were also effective in envisaging potential changes to enhance the school experience of LAC; however, this was unanimously identified as the hardest question for participants to answer.

#### **6.11. A RESPONSE TO THE METHODOLOGICAL CRITIQUES**

During the literature review a number of methodological critiques were raised which warrant further consideration here in light of the current study.

##### **6.11.1. EVANGELICAL TERMINOLOGY**

Carter et al., (2006) reported that in some instances participants have demonstrated discomfort with the language used within AI, referring to it as 'new age' and 'evangelical', advocating this language could challenge the scientific rigour of the approach. Within this research experience, and the pilot interview, there was only one occasion where the language used posed some discomfort, which was a reluctance to adopt 'provocative proposition' terminology evident during the final workshop. Whilst this evidence suggests participants are predominantly willing to adopt this terminology, it is important to be mindful of this potential discomfort in future applications.

##### **6.11.2. ONLY HEARING THE POSITIVE**

Another criticism of the AI framework is that the affirmative focus fails to report challenges and barriers associated with the area of inquiry. There is also an important distinction to be made between 'positive' and 'appreciative'. It is recognised that AI and appreciative questioning is a diligent search for the best of what is (Carter et al., 2006) and the purpose of AI is to identify moments of success rather than exploring the participants



likes and dislikes (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006). AI does encourage the participants to be positive and to identify the positive core within the organisation; it is not however a search for the positive or the negative, it is a search for those characteristics which enable the organisation to flourish and excel (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003).

However the interview experiences here, with both LAC and with adults, provides contrary evidence and even the most vulnerable pupils were able to convey their concerns within this affirmative framework. Whilst IPA data indicates the majority of the information shared during the course of the interview was of a positive nature, there were numerous occasions when neutral or negative information was shared (section 6.7.1 and section 6.8.1). It was perceived to be a responsibility of the researcher to listen to the concerns raised and explore them as appropriate before redirecting attention to the affirmative areas of inquiry; this concurs with the recognition that the researcher should acknowledge frustrations and difficulties before ‘steering’ participants in another direction, when they have had adequate time to express their concerns (Christie, 2006). The key here is to reframe the identified difficulties in a way that enhances the participants ability to overcome them (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006). Through reframing the researcher is able to challenge the participants thinking by offering alternative perspectives in a way that is plausible, acceptable and meaningful (Cormier, Nurius, & Osborn, 2009). There were numerous examples where it was necessary to positively reframe, for example, concerns were elicited regarding the transition process and this was reframed to encourage the participant to consider those times when communication had been more effective and how we can build on this success in future.

### **6.11.3. INTRODUCING AI**

There has also been debate concerning the appropriateness of introducing the principles of AI at the outset of a research project and it has been advocated that participants should be allowed to experience AI without any preconceived judgements regarding the research methodology (Christie, 2006). Former studies have introduced the principles of AI prior to research commencing and

it has been reported there were no adverse consequences and this process was helpful in terms of defining the context for research (Conklin, 2009; McConkey, Nixon, Donaghy, & Mulhern, 2004; Willoughby & Tosey, 2007). However, these studies cited only report this in the context of research with adults. Shuayb et al., (2009) explained the principles of AI to children and young people as they had an active role within the research process as both participants and as interviewers. There is no literature which advocates AI should not be explained to children or young people.

In the present study, a decision was made to outline the AI principles at the initial planning meeting with the designated LAC teacher, and, at the start of the individual research meetings with LAC and with school staff. AI was explained in its most simplistic terms and this evoked little reaction or response from participants. The greatest response was from one of the social workers who acknowledged that this seemed to be an ‘interesting’ approaching to research. At a personal level, it felt appropriate to put the research in context and explain the 4-D cycle to ensure participants were fully informed of the research process. This research does not generate evidence to suggest that the principles of AI should not be introduced at the start of the research process.

#### **6.11.4. A RESEARCH PHASE?**

The final point to consider is whether AI is just a research ‘phase’? In a recent review of the action research literature, Dick (2004) identified there are a number of current trends within the area of action research and AI is the approach which appears to be growing quickest. However, it is recognised that there can be fad phenomena, where ideas are favoured due to their increasing popularity in a particular arena (Bushe and Kassam, 2005). Carter et al., (2006) argues that this current interest in AI is not due to its recent emergence as an approach as we know this is not true given its development in the 1980s; it is suggested that this interest has occurred due to the recent activity in the spheres of research and organisational change. Within the AI framework the only measure of durability is rigorous applications and

evaluations over time. Hopefully the research here details the strengths of the AI approach and the numerous avenues for further research.

#### **6.11.5. SUMMARY: THE METHODOLOGICAL CRITIQUES**

Through this research a response to the methodological critiques is offered and whilst there were some reservations regarding ‘provocative proposition’ terminology, this research demonstrated participants were able to raise both positive and negative views and there was no adverse impact of introducing AI to participants at the start of the research. Further applications and evaluations of AI are required before conclusions can be drawn regarding the longevity of AI.

#### **6.12. LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH**

This research has identified a number of key themes which have the greatest positive impact on the school experience of LAC. It is hoped that in promoting these factors there will be positive impact on academic achievement. Through the use of AI, a number of meaningful and achievable actions were also defined to further improve the school experience. Whilst the themes identified fit saliently within the existing literature base, themes are personalised and meaningful to the organisation. This in itself is a transformational approach in contrast with the literature in this area which has historically attempted to justify poor outcomes.

This research has also provided an exploratory opportunity to investigate the efficacy of the AI approach and has provided support for its application within the field of education. In doing so, this provided a meaningful opportunity to attain the voice of the child to inform the development of the school organisation; these opportunities are too often overlooked. This research has also provided a number of avenues for further inquiry.

There are however a number of limitations to consider. As detailed in section 4.4) whilst the case study methodology is suitable for this approach there are subsequent implications for generalisation. As emphasised from the outset, AI aims to capture the truth within one organisation, rather than identifying

universal truths (Sekerka & McCraty, 2004), it is not designed to compare and contrast results between organisations, instead, it is perceived as a strategy for macro- level reform with a single organisation (Ryan, et al., 1999). Case studies do however offer the possibility to develop theories at a case level (Mjoset, 2009), and this research provides an illustrative case study which enables analytical generalisation (Yin, 2009) and can inform, or develop understanding within, similar organisations (Gillham, 2000). It is hoped however that the themes and propositions detailed here may inspire other schools within the local authority to evaluate their own practice when working with LAC. It was beyond the scope of this research to develop a multiple case design but future research would enable further triangulation of these finding.

#### **6.12.1. A COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH EXPERIENCE**

Within this research there were a number of challenges which prevented the opportunity for participants to engage in collaborative group experiences, which is advocated as a strength of AI (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2007). As noted previously it was not possible to arrange group AI interviews with the school staff due to time constraints. AI theorists advocate that the ideal is to spend a day with a group of stakeholders exploring the discovery phase alone (Lewis, et al., 2007). This was simply not practical within this school setting. Such group interactions are arguably fundamental in creating a shared vision for the future and positive energy for change, which is perceived to be a by-product of this process (Fitzgerald, et al., 2003). This is likely to have impacted on the participants' experience of AI and in particular their perceptions of the likelihood of change.

It is recognised that there are number of benefits to group interviewing within social research: it can add valuable insight to understanding of social and behavioural events (Frey & Fontana, 1991), it can allow exploration of sensitive issues through group solidarity, and there are practical issues pertaining to time and costs incurred (Robson, 2007). Alongside these strengths there are also challenges such as participants with dominant personalities (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007) and group characteristics to consider which can impact interactions and responses (Frey & Fontana, 1991).

However, personal reflections can also be made on the different experiences between the pilot interview conducted (section 4.11) and the research experience detailed here. When working with the group of participants it was observable there was a heightened sense of energy, participation, interaction and the group cohesiveness developed over the course of the interview. The efficacy of AI as a tool for research with groups of educational professional warrants further exploration and it is disappointing this was not achievable within the current research.

With particular consideration to LAC it was decided that interviews would take place on an individual basis due to the vulnerable nature of participants. When LAC were asked if they would be happy to repeat the experience within a group they expressed a preference for individual interviews; it has been noted that group interviewing can highlight adolescent vulnerabilities and may place participants at risk (Hyde, Howlett, Brady, & Drennan, 2005).

Throughout the 4-D cycle there was no direct contact between LAC and the school staff which was identified as an area for improvement in future research. If we consider the discovery phase and the process of exploring the reality of an organisation, which is potentially the most sensitive, there are implications of conducting group research with LAC and staff. Whilst the appreciative focus may have some protective element, it may inhibit the sharing of information which is deemed negative, and may lead to an inaccuracy in findings. There are also power issues to consider between participants, for example, high status individuals would have to be managed not only due to the potential of dominating the group, particularly LAC, due to their experience and knowledge and their mere presence can inhibit the expression of the views of others (Gillham, 2000). As an independent researcher, it is possible to obtain the views of stakeholders and to remain objective and unbiased; in contrast when children are approached by members of staff from within the local authority it is recognised their views may be suppressed (Munro, 2001). Future research should consider the most appropriate point to bridge the research process between the two groups, in a way that is meaningful and empowering for all participants. Whist it had been

hoped that children and staff would attend the workshop this was hindered by organisational issues within the school. Future research could learn from the work of Doveston & Keenaghan (2006b) who conducted the dream stage of the 4-D cycle with children and adults and this could become the point for collaboration as there are examples of commonality between children and professionals in terms of desired changes for the future (McGinnity, 2007). This is clearly an area for future research.

#### **6.12.2. SUMMARY: LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH**

Within this final section, a number of research strengths are identified providing further support for the application of AI. However, it is acknowledged that there are some methodological limitations. In particular, there were difficulties honouring the collaborative process underlying AI as there were a number of logistical barriers which could not be overcome. In addition, future research needs to consider ways in which we can bridge collaborative between groups in a way that is meaningful and empowering.

In the final chapter conclusions will be drawn, implications for EP practice are highlighted, and areas for future research are identified.

## **CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS**

This thesis aimed to identify core themes which have the greatest positive impact on the school experience of LAC, in secondary schools, through the use of AI. In doing so, this also provide an opportunity to further explore the efficacy of AI within the field of education, as a research tool for working with LAC and school staff, and, for promoting positive change.

These aims were achieved as a range of core themes were identified which contribute to the successful secondary school experience of LAC. These included: effective adult support, engaging learning opportunities, rewarding school systems, a safe and secure environment, good quality relationships, and the importance of normalising the school experience. A range of supplementary themes were also identified including: the importance of PEP meetings, of staff training, of promoting emotional well-being, and the qualities of an effective staff team were identified.

This research found AI to be an effective research tool; it enables an interactive interview experience, which considers a range of positively affirmed views whilst paying due consideration to participant concerns. It was also identified that it is highly likely that a number of changes will occur within the school setting as a result of this research.

In this final chapter the impact of these findings on educational psychology practice are considered, alongside areas for future research.

### **7.1. IMPLICATIONS FOR EP PRACTICE**

The findings from this research have implications for EP practice. Primarily this research provides evidence to enhance our understanding of the factors which contribute to the successful secondary school experience of LAC, and bearing these factors in mind, we can provide informed guidance to school to promote the ECM outcomes. Whilst AI has not identified a wealth of themes qualitatively different from those identified within current government publications (DCSF, 2009g) these themes have become more meaningful to the organisation; AI can be seen to enhance and personalise this knowledge and

ground good practice in peak experiences. This concurs with the suggestion that AI is an approach which aims to highlight and extend best practice (Carnell, 2005).

AI has also been identified as an effective tool for research. Anecdotally the use of AI within the field of educational psychology is gaining momentum and this thesis will hopefully contribute to the growing knowledge base in this area. It has been emphasised that EPs are well-placed to engage in educational research of this nature; research that is complex and requires a meta-perspective, high quality, and clarity, and AI can facilitate this process (Cullen & Ramoutar, 2003). There are further implications in terms of the use of AI, at a basic level, appreciative questioning provides another tool which can be utilised in our every day practice. This research has also highlighted the strength of narrative based approaches to research with young people. It has also reiterated the importance of hearing the voice of the child and advocating that voice to encourage change.

The role of the researcher within the AI process is broad; in this instance the role of the researcher was to facilitate the interview, to reframe, to challenge and shift perception, within a time-limited framework, to identify themes and support the creation of provocative propositions. However, AI can be as flexible, exciting, and enigmatic as the organisation allows and therefore has great potential. It is important that the EP has a good understanding of the challenges this poses, especially when working with vulnerable children and the novice AI researcher should be supervised by an appropriately experience colleague.

## **7.2. A TOOL FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT**

Over the course of this research the flexibility of AI has been demonstrated; AI can be employed for research and development at the classroom level i.e. regarding behaviour, classroom dynamics, and social relationships (Doveston & Keenaghan, 2006a, 2006b) and at the organisational level (Willoughby & Tosey, 2007). It is a tool for interviewing (Michael, 2005), for evaluating interventions (Calabrese, et al., 2008), and as a tool for inspiring change,



hope, and transforming discourse (Cullen & Ramoutar, 2003; Doveston & Keenaghan, 2006a, 2006b). This thesis has identified the strength of AI as a tool for organisational research.

However, AI is ultimately a tool for research and for development. In line with the underpinnings of the 4-D model, at the design phase findings are given back to the organisation and individuals are encouraged to take responsibility for action (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001; van Vuuren & Crous, 2005). In many ways the skills of the EP can be aligned with the research element, however the 'development' aspect is the responsibility of the school. The EPs role in is perhaps 'catalytic' in the development aspect, acting as an agent for inspiring change. There was one occasion in the workshop where it was agreed that the link EP may be able to facilitate some of these planned developments, i.e. supporting the transition of LAC attending feeder primary schools, but other actions were the primarily the responsibility of the school.

### **7.3. AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Throughout the course of this discussion a number of potential areas for future research have been highlighted. It is recognised that the use of AI within education is at an early stage of development and further research is required to identify those situations which may limit the use of this framework (Smart & Mann, 2003). For example the impact of individual characteristics on LAC's engagement with the AI process has been recognised and it may be interesting to consider if AI is more successful with particular groups of participants and / or personality types.

More specifically, there are areas of future research emanating from this thesis. Whilst AI is an approach which is concerned with identifying the reality for a single organisation, it has been recognised that collaboration between institutions would allow sharing of valuable innovations and greater understanding of educational practice, production of good practice guidance, and professional development (Sweet, Wilson, Pugsley, & Schofield, 2008). Whilst it is hoped this will be achieved to a degree, through the dissemination of research findings across organisations, a multiple case study design was

beyond the scope of this thesis. There are potential benefits of exploring this in the future as this would enable further triangulation of the key themes identified, and, it would provide a wider scope of evaluating the efficacy of AI.

Given the implications of staff engagement, within the research process, consideration could also be paid to the possibility of training school staff in the AI principles and encouraging them to take ownership of the research as more active participants. This could be possible at a school, departmental, or individual level (i.e. the designated LAC teacher adopting the role of lead researcher). This would have implications for the role of the EP as instead of taking responsibility for the implementation of the research agenda, the key role would be providing guidance, supervision, and support to school staff.

#### **7.4. PERSONAL REFLECTIONS**

On a personal level, this thesis has been a meaningful yet challenging accomplishment. In accordance with my own values and beliefs, this research has provided a holistic account of LAC and their successes in secondary school, from a positively affirmed, socio-cultural and child-centred perspective. If anything, it has furthered my commitment to working with LAC and working within a more affirmatively orientated perspective. At times, I have questioned the efficacy of AI when faced with barriers to accessing participants, a lack of commitment from school staff, difficulty engaging participants, and the lack of direction in the latter stages of the 4-D cycle. However the success of the final workshop, in terms of the acceptance of research findings and the spontaneous nature of action planning, restored my faith in the AI process. Within this school organisation it is highly likely there were be changes to promote the positive outcomes of our most vulnerable child, our children in care.

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## CHAPTER 9: APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: PAPERS EXCLUDED FROM THE SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

The table below details the journal articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria for the systematic review and were omitted from the information synthesis:

AUTHOR	MAIN SUBJECTS	COUNTRY
Alewine (2003)	School library administrators; change of job from specialist to consultant role.	USA
Allenspach, Bell, & Whittlestone (2008)	Vetinary undergraduate students and new approaches to learning.	UK
Andersson, Bogh, Olsen, & Thornberg, (2005)	Day care institution aiming to reduce social inequality; full text written in Danish.	Danish
Baker & Wright, (2006)	Medical field: clinical network re: childhood liver disease.	UK
Bezzina (2008)	Age range; developing practice in pre-school (kindergarten).	Australia
Bowling & Brahm (2002)	Community; AI project to shape and transform community culture.	USA
Calabrese, et al., (2008)	Business; How to improve the preparation and practice of educational administration on a global basis.	Cross-Cultural (author USA)
Carlson (2007)	Higher education; introduction of a new information system for University Geography students.	USA
Carter (2006)	Health; description of AI and discussion of research by Carter, Cummings, & Cooper.	UK



Carter (2006b)	Health: childhood nursing and the need to celebrate the positive.	UK
Carter (2006)	Health: children, families and nursing.	UK
Carter, Cummings, & Cooper (2007)	Health: Multi-agency working for children's complex health needs, excluded as only 1 child participant.	UK
Chapman & Giles (2009)	Professional Practice: midwife lecturer.	New Zealand
Christie (2006)	An interview with Hallie Preskill (not empirical).	USA
Clark (2009)	Launching of the Revans Academy for Action Learning and Research (not empirical).	UK
Clasen & Mors (2004)	Inaccessible; journal written in Danish.	Danish
Conklin (2009)	Organisation of a college classroom and preparation for business studies.	USA
Crozier (2007)	Masters research project on work life balance.	USA
Dalsgaard (2005)	Inaccessible; journal written in Danish.	Danish
Dick (2004)	Not empirical; summary of developments in action research.	Australia
Elleven (2007)	Higher education / not empirical; developing practice by office of student affairs.	USA
Katborg & Clasen (2006)	Inaccessible; journal written in Danish.	Danish
Kowalski (2008)	Health; descriptive account of AI.	Canada
Farrell, Douglas & Siltanen(2003)	Higher education / health; priorities and attitudes of nursing programmes and the community of interest.	USA
Farrell, Wallis, & Evans (2007)	Higher education / health; replication of above cited study.	USA
Fischer, Geiger, & Hughes (2007)	Community; female drug offenders experience of drug court.	USA

Fryer-Edwards, et al., (2007)	Higher education / health; professional development in a university school of medicine.	USA
Giles & Alderson (2008)	Higher education; AI with adult students.	New Zealand
Godwin & Kaplan (2008)	Descriptive account of an e-learning course on AI.	USA
Grant, Stahl, & Rogerson (2009)	Business; training ICT professionals.	Canada / UK
Griswold (2003)	Health; account does not use appreciative inquiry.	USA
Head (2006)	Higher education; AI to facilitate group processes.	USA
Inui & Frankel (2006)	Health; investigation of physician and patient relationship.	USA
Kumari & Babur (2009)	Higher education: application to leadership in a private university.	Pakistan
Keefe & Pesut (2004)	Higher education; leadership transitions and organisational development.	USA
Lander (2002)	Higher education; analysis of practitioners writing.	Canada
Lavender & Chapple (2004)	Health; review of midwifery practice.	UK
Lind & Smith (2008)	Health; analysis of community nursing practice.	Canada
Luckcock (2007)	Use AI as a tool for reflection within career progression.	UK
Mackey & Thomas (2005)	Higher education / business; AI used to evaluate internships (predominantly AI interviewing).	USA
Madsen (2009)	Use of AI questioning to facilities collaborative helping and engaging families.	USA
Marchionni & Richer (2007)	Health; use of AI to promote implementation of evidence based practice.	Canada

Markova & Holland, (2005)	Descriptive account of school staff retreat; emphasis on the AI model rather than implementation.	USA
McAdama & Mirza (2009)	Community; method for encouraging hopes and dreams for the future, participants 15-25.	UK
Moody, Horton-Deutsch, & Pesut (2007)	Health; applications of AI within nursing education to create cultural changes.	USA
Neville (2008)	Higher Education; Use of AI to inform learning and curriculum within higher education setting.	USA
Niblett (2008)	Article based on 'appreciative resistance' rather than 'appreciative inquiry' methodology, both positivistic approaches but qualitatively different.	Canada
Norum, Wells, Hoadley, & Geary (2002)	Higher education; application of AI as an evaluation of a university course in education and technology.	USA
O'Donnell (2004)	Descriptive article of appreciative inquiry methodology.	UK
Onyett (2009)	Descriptive synopsis of solution focused and AI approaches.	UK
Plews-Ogan, et al., (2008)	Health / higher education; application to graduate medical education.	USA
Preziosi & Gooden (2002)	Business; study with middle and senior level executives from health care and government, regarding leadership education.	USA
Quaintance, Arnold, & Thompson, (2010)	Health / higher education; Medical education of professionalism with university medical students.	USA
Reed (2006)	Descriptive article reviewing research article reported by Carter (2006).	UK
Saunders (2003)	Higher education: retention activity using AI within a college of arts and science.	USA

Sherwood (2006)	Health; appreciative business planning within the field of nursing education.	USA
Shreeve (2008)	Health; application of AI within chiropractic college and adult based learning.	USA
Sweet, et al., (2008)	Health; analysis of teaching dental practice.	UK
Taft & White (2009)	Descriptive account of an award winner for research, involving undergraduates.	USA
Tennant & Anderson (1997)	Higher education study; applied to explore changes in educational culture at Bible college.	USA
Vanasupaa, Rogers, & Chen, (2008)	Higher education study; impact of project-based learning on graduate engineer students.	USA
Varley, et al., (2010)	Health; treatment and care of people with epilepsy.	Ireland
Walker & Carr (2003)	Overview and descriptive summary of AI within education.	Canada
Walsh (2002)	Book for families who are living with Down Syndrome.	UK
Wear, Aultman, Zarconi, & Varley (2009)	Investigation of residents' and attending doctors' perspective of humour.	UK
Wright & Baker (2005)	Perspectives of staff working within the NHS.	UK

*Table 1. Articles excluded from the systematic literature review*





#### APPENDIX 4: INTRODUCTORY SCRIPT

The script detailed below was used at the start of each AI interview.

- Thank the participant for attending the meeting.
- Explain purpose of meeting - how we can make schools better (or more effective) for LAC.
- Emphasise participants views are really important.
- Explain confidentiality, anonymity, and right to withdraw.
- Seek consent for audio-recording.
- Explain working with lots of different members of staff and LAC.
- Explain dissemination of findings.
- Explain AI:
  - Positive approach which aims to discover the best of what is happening;
  - Lots of different interviews and group themes will be identified.
  - Explain based on this provocative propositions (mission statement) will be made.
  - Workshop session to plan future actions.
  - Prompt for questions and check understanding

## APPENDIX 5: EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE [LAC]

1. On a scale of 1-10, do you feel you have been listened to today?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

---

Not at all

Very much so

2. Which questions did you find easiest to answer? Why?

3. Which questions did you find hardest to answer? Why?

4. Do you feel you have been able to discuss your concerns as well as the more positive aspects of school life?

5. How difficult was it to devise mission statements / provocative propositions?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

---

Very Easy

Very difficult



6. How likely do you think it is that change will occur based on the mission statements and action plans we have made?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

---

Very Unlikely

Very Likely

7. Is there anything you feel you haven't been able to discuss today which is important to you?

8. What would you like to happen differently if this experience was to be repeated?

## APPENDIX 6: EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE [SCHOOL STAFF]

1. On a scale of 1-10, do you feel you have been listened during the interview process?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

---

Not at all

Very much so

2. Which questions did you find easiest to answer? Why?

3. Which questions did you find hardest to answer? Why?

4. Do you feel you have been able to discuss your concerns as well as the more positive aspects of school life?

5. Do you agree the mission statements / provocative propositions accurately portray your interview? Have you made many changes to those suggested?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

---

Very Easy

Very difficult

6. How likely do you think it is that any change will occur based on this process?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

---

Very Unlikely

Very Likely

7. Is there anything you feel you haven't been able to discuss which is important to you?

8. What would you like to happen differently if this experience was to be repeated?

## APPENDIX 7: INFORMATION SHEET FOR CARER

[Researcher Name]

[Address]

[Date]

### RESEARCH STUDY

#### Looked After Children: Improving the School Experience

Dear [name of carer],

I am currently employed as a Trainee Educational Psychologist within [name of local authority]. As part of my professional training in Educational and Child Psychology at Manchester University, I am hoping to conduct a research study with [name of school]. This study aims to explore how Secondary Schools can improve the school experience, and promote better educational outcomes, for looked after children. This study has been discussed with [designated LAC teacher] from [name of school] and [name of senior social worker] from the Looked after Children's Team and both are in support of this research. I am writing to give you some more information regarding the study and to seek your consent for [name of child] to participate.

There are many published research documents identifying the difficulties experienced by looked after children during schooling. There is little research however that focuses on what works really well and what schools are doing right. This research study therefore aims to identify good practice and existing strengths within the secondary school setting, from both the pupils' and teachers' perspectives.

This research would involve individual interviews with looked after children and staff from [name of school]. Interviews would last for approximately 30-45 minutes and would take place within school hours. Each child will be interviewed individually and will not be informed which other children are also taking part. Questions will be asked regarding the child's best memories of school, what they value most about the school they attend and how they would like to see their future at school.

The interviews with both children and staff will be audio recorded, transcribed for themes, and stored confidentially. By analysing all of the interviews for common themes, this ensures that the children participating, and individual staff members, will not be identifiable from their responses. The names of children, teachers, schools and local authorities will not be used in the reporting of findings. It is also hoped that an action plan, for the future, will be composed to highlight the most effective ways of supporting children who are looked after, which can be shared with other Secondary Schools and [name of local authority] Looked After Children's Team.

The results will also contribute to a Doctoral degree at the University of Manchester. A copy of this research report will be stored at the University and the results may be used in future publications, conference papers and research articles.

If you are happy to give your consent for [name of child] to participate in this study, please sign the consent form at the bottom of the page and return in the stamped-addressed envelope to the address above. If you are happy to do so, a time will be arranged with [designated LAC teacher] for me to visit school and meet with [name of child]. Hopefully this will be before the summer holidays. [name of child] will be asked if she is happy to participate at the start of the meeting; she will be informed she has the right to opt out of the study at any point and she can refuse to answer any of the questions.

If I have not heard from you by [date] I will contact you to see if you are happy for [name of child]. If you would like to discuss this further or ask me any questions, please feel free to contact me on [telephone number] or [email address].

Thank you for considering this request.

Yours sincerely,

[Name]

Trainee Educational Psychologist



**RESEARCH STUDY**

Looked After Children: Improving the School Experience

**PERMISSION SLIP**

I give my permission for [name of child] to participate in this research study to explore how Secondary Schools can improve the school experience for looked after children. I have read and understood the letter describing the purpose and procedures of the study. I understand I can ask questions at any time and that we, carer and / or child, may withdraw our permission at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Child's name (Please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Carer's name (Please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Carer Date

## APPENDIX 8: INFORMATION SHEET FOR SOCIAL WORKER

[Researcher Name]

[Address]

[Date]

### RESEARCH STUDY

#### Looked After Children: Improving the School Experience

Dear [name of social worker],

I am currently employed as a Trainee Educational Psychologist within [name of local authority]. As part of my professional doctorate training, in Educational and Child Psychology at Manchester University, I am hoping to conduct a research study with [name of school]. This study aims to explore how secondary schools can improve the school experience, and promote better educational outcomes, for looked after children. This study has been discussed with [designated LAC teacher] from [name of school] and [name of senior social worker] from the Looked after Children's Team and both are in support of this research.

I am writing to give you some more information regarding the study. Having had discussions with [name of senior social worker] I am of the understanding that Parental Responsibility for [name of child] is with you and the parents, so I am writing to seek your consent for their participation.

#### Background information

As you will be well aware, there are many published research documents identifying the difficulties experienced by looked after children during schooling. Having met with [name of senior social worker] it was decided that a research project investigating the school experiences of looked after children in secondary school would be particularly beneficial, due to the levels of underachievement noted, both nationally and within [name of local authority].

Interestingly, there is little published research that focuses on success within school, what works well, and what schools are doing right, especially from the

looked after child's perspective. This research study therefore aims to identify good practice and existing strengths within a secondary school setting, from both the pupils' and teachers' perspectives. The research will therefore aim to investigate how we can enhance the school experience of looked after children in order to improve educational outcomes.

### Methodology

The research methodology will involve a case study of a [name of school] and explore their practice with looked after children. This will be framed within an appreciative inquiry approach (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001); this is an affirmative, positively orientated model which encapsulates the voice of both the looked after child and school staff. This includes exploring four elements:

1. *Discover* - identify the best of what is already happening in schools
2. *Dream* - what might be, what would the ideal future look like?
3. *Design* - What should be the ideal be?
4. *Destiny* - empower and encourage change within school

Individual interviews with looked after children and staff from [name of school]. Interviews would last for approximately 30-45 minutes and would take place within school hours.

It is anticipated that at least 3 looked after children, identified by [designated LAC teacher] from [name of school] will be involved in this research. Each child will be interviewed individually and will not be informed which other children are also taking part. Questions will be asked regarding the child's best memories of school, what they value most about the school they attend and how they would like to see their future at school.

### Data Analysis

The interviews with both children and staff will be audio recorded, transcribed for themes, and then erased. All data will be stored confidentially. By analysing all of the interviews thematically, this ensures that the children participating, and individual staff members, will not be identifiable from their responses. Only group level themes will be reported.



### Dissemination of data

Following these interviews, there will be a group workshop with school staff to explore the research findings and to develop an action plan for the future. It is hoped that this will provide some guidance for other secondary schools and [name of local authority] Looked after Children's Team.

The results will also contribute to a Doctoral degree at the University of Manchester. A copy of this research report will be stored at the University and the results may be used in future publications, conference papers and research articles. The names of children, teachers, schools and local authorities will not be used in the reporting of findings.

### Ethical approval and research governance

This project will be managed jointly by [name of local authority] and The University of Manchester. It will be subject to the Research Governance rules of these institutions. This research will be completed in accordance with the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct (2006) and the DECP Professional Practice Guidelines (2002).

### Consent

If you are happy to give your consent for [name of child] to participate in this study, can you please sign the consent form attached and return to the address above. If you are happy to do so, a time will be arranged with [designated LAC teacher] for me to visit school and meet with [name of child]. I have attached a permission slip on the final page of this letter.

I am hoping to complete these interviews before the summer holidays and would appreciate your response as soon as possible. [Name of child] will be asked if she is happy to participate at the start of the interview; they will be informed they have the right to opt out of the study at any point and they can refuse to answer any of the questions.

If I have not heard from you by [date], I will contact you to see if you are happy for [name of child]. If you would like to discuss this further or have any questions, please feel free to contact me on [telephone number] or [email address].

Thank you for considering this request.

Yours sincerely,

[Name]

Trainee Educational Psychologist



## APPENDIX 9: INFORMATION SHEET [LAC]

[Researcher name]

[address]

[date]

### RESEARCH PROJECT

Dear [name of child],

I am writing to tell you about a research project I am doing at your high school. This project is exploring how school staff can support Looked after Children across all areas of school life. I have written to [name of carer] and they have said it's ok for me to meet with you. I would just like to hear about your best experiences in school. We will talk about your best memories, the things you enjoy most, and any extra help you might find useful. If you are happy to do this, I will be visiting [name of school] on [Date]. [Designated LAC teacher] will ask you to come and meet with me and you will be asked to miss one of your lessons. Our meeting will last between 30-45 minutes.

I will be working with lots of different children and teachers and will be putting all the answers together in one report to make a list of themes. This means the people reading my project won't know which answers were yours and which answers were given by other people. The names of people taking part won't be used in the research project either so all of the information shared will be confidential.

The final project will be shared with school staff and [name of local authority] Looked After Children's team, to give them ideas about what they can do differently, when working with looked after children. It will also form part of a research project for my university.

I very much look forward to meeting with you soon.

Yours Sincerely

[name]

Trainee Educational Psychologist

**RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY**

**Appreciative Inquiry: Changing the Landscape for Looked after Children**

**Background Information**

I am currently working as a Trainee Educational Psychologist within [name of local authority]. For my doctoral thesis, in Child and Educational psychology, I am undertaking a research project which aims to explore the best ways we can support looked after children in secondary schools and how we can improve their school experience and promote educational achievements.

The method of research is aligned to the field of appreciative inquiry; a positively orientated framework which searches for the best practice within an organisation and explores how we can build upon that success.

This research is being supported by the Local Authority and Senior Staff members within your school.

It is really important that the research findings capture a range of participant's views. Looked after children have already been recruited to this research and I am now looking for a group of staff to participate in a group interview.

**Staff Participation**

I am hoping to complete a group interview and workshop which will draw on your experiences of working with looked after children. The first part of the meeting, dependant on the number of participants, will take between 30-40 minutes. This will be followed by a small workshop which aims to develop action plans for the future. Again this will last for approximately 30 minutes. Alternatively this can be split over two sessions.

Whilst I understand the time constraints that you are faced with on a daily basis, I hope you see the value in the proposed research and the importance of

your contributions. I will be as flexible as possible, working with small groups or a larger group, at a time most suitable for you.

### **Data Analysis**

Interviews will be audio recorded, to allow opportunities for clarification following the group session, listened to and then erased. All data will be stored confidentially and anonymously. By identifying themes during the interviews, participants will not be identifiable from their individual responses. Only group level themes will be reported.

### **Dissemination of data**

It is hoped that the general findings and action plan developed will provide some guidance for other secondary schools and [name of local authority] Looked after Children's Team. The results will also contribute to a Doctoral degree at the University of Manchester. A copy of this research report will be stored at the University and the results may be used in future publications, conference papers and research articles. The names of children, teachers, schools and local authorities will not be used in the reporting of findings.

### **Ethical approval and research governance**

This project will be managed jointly by [name of local authority] and The University of Manchester. It will be subject to the Research Governance rules of these institutions. This research will be completed in accordance with the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct (2006) and the DECP Professional Practice Guidelines (2002).

If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me on the details below. I look forward to working with you in the near future.

Many Thanks

[Name] - Trainee Educational Psychologist

[Address] / [Phone] / [Email address]

**APPENDIX 11: AN OVERVIEW OF THE MEDICAL INTERACTION PROCESS  
SYSTEM MODEL**

<p><i>Dependant modes (i.e. dependant on content categories i.e. theme being discussed)</i></p>	<p>Asks questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Open questions</li> <li>2. Closed questions</li> <li>3. Leading questions (a)</li> <li>4. Multiple question (a)</li> <li>5. Focused open questions(a)</li> </ol> <p>Checks:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Information</li> <li>2. Understanding</li> <li>3. Summarises</li> </ol> <p>Gives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Information (neutral)</li> <li>2. Information (positive)</li> <li>3. Information (negative)</li> <li>4. Reassurance (a)</li> <li>5. False reassurance</li> <li>6. Orientations</li> </ol> <p>Seeks Information Directs / advises</p>
<p><i>Independent modes:</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Agreements</li> <li>2. Facilitates speech (a)</li> <li>3. Registers information</li> <li>4. Positive response</li> <li>5. Negative response</li> <li>6. Empathy / psychological support (a)</li> </ol>

	<p>7. Laughs</p> <p>8. Asks for repetition</p> <p>9. Requests / preference (b)</p> <p>10. Interrupts</p> <p>Expresses:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Irritation (c)</li> <li>2. Gratitude (c)</li> <li>3. Apology (c)</li> <li>4. Concern (c)</li> </ol>
Key:	<p>(a) Specific to Doctor/ Professional</p> <p>(b) Specific to client / interviewee</p> <p>(c) Affective categories</p>

*Table 2: Overview of MIPS*



## APPENDIX 12: MODES OF EXCHANGE - DESCRIPTION OF TERMS USED

The information contained in this Interactional Process Analysis is adapted from the MIPS model as proposed by Ford et al., (2000).

Dependant Modes of Exchange	Definition
<b>Asks questions:</b>	
Open questions (which incorporates the use of 'focused open questions' as identified in the MIPS model).	A question framed in a way which encourages full expression of an opinion, rather than a yes or no answer, or otherwise constrained response.
Closed questions	A question where the answer must be selected from a limited set, for example, questions implying a yes or no response.
Leading questions (a)	A question which makes assumptions regarding the participants' response, and the question influences the answer sometimes legitimately; may be used to check reliability.
Multiple question (a)	Questions which identify the options from which participants can choose their response.

<b>Gives Information:</b>	
Information (neutral)	Information that is conveyed in a neutral tone, i.e. information that is factual.
Information (positive) (c)	Information that is given which conveys a sense of hope, optimism, happiness, or, when encouraging news or feedback is given.
Information (negative) (c)	Information that is given which conveys sadness, regret, disappointment, or, when bad news or feedback is given.
Reassurance (a)	To restore confidence and alleviate apprehensions.
<b>Checks:</b>	
Information	Check for clarity of information received.
Understanding	Either party checks information received has been understood correctly.
Summarises	Recapping information in a condensed form or reducing to the main points.

Independent Modes of Exchange	Definition
Agreements	Recognition of compatible opinions or observations.
Facilitates speech (a)	Verbal prompts and gestures which encourage the continuation of speech.
Registers information	Acknowledgement of information received through verbal prompts.
Empathy / psychological support (a)	Capacity to understand and enter into another person's feelings; emotional support.
Laughs	Expression of laughter.
Asks for repetition	Either party asking for dialogue to be repeated.
Interrupts	To break, stop, or hinder the exchange of dialogue.
<b>Expresses:</b>	
Irritation (c)	An expression of aggravation or annoyance.
Gratitude (c)	An expression of thankfulness and appreciation.
Apology (c)	An expression of regret.

Concern (c)	Feelings of sympathy towards someone; an anxious feeling.
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*Table 3: Description of terms*

Key:

- (a) Specific to interviewer
- (b) Specific to interviewee
- (c) Affective categories

The following categories were omitted from the analysis as they were not deemed to be appropriate within the constructs of a research interview:

- Orientations
- False reassurance
- Seeks information (this can be acknowledged through the use of questions)
- Directs / advises
- Requests / preference
- Negative response
- Positive response

*The latter two are excluded as the focus on giving information which is neutral, positive, or negative, is sufficient for the purposes of this analysis.*

Source: Definitions adopted from Colman (2006); Ford, et al., (2000); Cohen, et al., (2000).

**APPENDIX 13: INTERACTIONAL PROCESS ANALYSIS - EXAMPLE  
CODING SHEET**

UNIT	SPEAKER (I.E. EP / CHILD / ADULT)	MODE OF EXCHANGE DEPENDANT OR INDEPENDENT	AFFECTIVE CATEGORIES
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			
16			
17			
18			
19			
20			
21			
22			
23			
24			
25			

**APPENDIX 14: INTERACTIONAL PROCESS ANALYSIS -EXAMPLE FREQUENCY SHEET**

**Interview 1 - RESEARCHER**

<b>Mode of Exchange</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Open questions	
Closed questions	
Leading questions (a)	
Multiple question (a)	
Information (neutral)	
Information (positive)	
Information (negative)	
Reassurance (a)	
Information	
Understanding	
Summarises	
Agreements	
Facilitates speech	
Registers information	
Empathy / psychological support (a)	
Laughs	
Asks for repetition	
Interrupts	
<b>Affective Categories</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Irritation (c)	
Gratitude (c)	
Apology (c)	
Concern (c)	

## APPENDIX 15: COMPLETED INTERACTIONAL PROCESS ANALYSIS FORM [LAC]

Beneath is a completed IPA form to give the reader a flavour of the data analysis methodology. Due to ethical reasons a decision was made not to include the transcript, due to the small sample size, participants would be readily identifiable even if steps were made to remove identifiable information.

UNIT	SPEAKER (I.E. RESEARCHER / CHILD / ADULT)	MODE OF EXCHANGE DEPENDANT OR INDEPENDENT	AFFECTIVE CATEGORIES
1.	RESEARCHER	Closed question	
2.	CHILD	Gives information	Neutral
3.	RESEARCHER	Checks information; gives reassurance	
4.	RESEARCHER	Open question; gives information; closed question	Neutral
5.	CHILD	Gives information	Negative
6.	RESEARCHER	Gives reassurance; gives information; open question	
7.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
8.	RESEARCHER	Registers information	
9.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
10.	RESEARCHER	Closed question	
11.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
12.	RESEARCHER	Summarises	
13.	CHILD	Agreement	
14.	RESEARCHER	Checks information	
15.	CHILD	Agreement	
16.	RESEARCHER	Closed question	
17.	CHILD	Gives information	Neutral
18.	RESEARCHER	Checks information	
19.	CHILD	Agreement; gives information	Laughs

20.	RESEARCHER	Closed question	
21.	CHILD	Gives information	Neutral
22.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
23.	CHILD	Gives information	Neutral
24.	RESEARCHER	Registers information	
25.	RESEARCHER	Multiple questions	
26.	CHILD	Gives information	Negative
27.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
28.	CHILD	Gives information	Neutral
29.	RESEARCHER	Registers information	
30.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
31.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
32.	RESEARCHER	Registers information	
33.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
34.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
35.	RESEARCHER	Closed question	
36.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
37.	RESEARCHER	Summarises	
38.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
39.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
40.	RESEARCHER	Facilitates speech	
41.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
42.	RESEARCHER	Summarises	
43.	CHILD	Agreement	
44.	RESEARCHER	Registers information	
45.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
46.	CHILD	Gives information	Neutral
47.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
48.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
49.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
50.	CHILD	Gives information	Neutral
51.	RESEARCHER	Registers information	
52.	RESEARCHER	Open question	



53.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
54.	RESEARCHER	Registers information	
55.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
56.	RESEARCHER	Gives information	Positive
57.	RESEARCHER	Summarises	
58.	CHILD	Agreement	
59.	RESEARCHER	Summarises	
60.	CHILD	Agreement	
61.	RESEARCHER	Closed question	
62.	RESEARCHER	Registers information	
63.	CHILD	Gives information	Neutral / laughs
64.	RESEARCHER	Registers information	Laughs
65.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
66.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
67.	RESEARCHER	Facilitates speech	
68.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
69.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
70.	CHILD	Interrupts; gives information	Positive / neutral
71.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
72.	CHILD	Gives information	Neutral
73.	RESEARCHER	Open question; gives reassurance; open question	
74.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
75.	RESEARCHER	Checks understanding	
76.	CHILD	Agreement	
77.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
78.	CHILD	Gives information	Neutral
79.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
80.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
81.	RESEARCHER	Registers information	
82.	RESEARCHER	Closed question	
83.	CHILD	Gives information	Negative

84.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
85.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
86.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
87.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
88.	RESEARCHER	Facilitates speech	
89.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
90.	RESEARCHER	Checks understanding	
91.	CHILD	Agreement	
92.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
93.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
94.	RESEARCHER	Checks understanding	
95.	CHILD	Agreement	
96.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
97.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
98.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
99.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
100.	RESEARCHER	Summarises	
101.	CHILD	Agreement	
102.	RESEARCHER	Checks understanding	
103.	CHILD	Agreement	
104.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
105.	CHILD	Gives information	Neutral
106.	RESEARCHER	Registers information	
107.	RESEARCHER	Closed question	
108.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
109.	RESEARCHER	Closed question	
110.	CHILD	Gives information	Neutral
111.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
112.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
113.	RESEARCHER	Facilitates speech	
114.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
115.	RESEARCHER	Registers information	
116.	RESEARCHER	Closed question	

117.	CHILD	Gives information	Neutral
118.	RESEARCHER	Checks understanding	
119.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
120.	CHILD	Gives information	Neutral
121.	RESEARCHER	Summarises	
122.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
123.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive; laughs
124.	RESEARCHER	Checks understanding	Laughs
125.	CHILD	Agreement	
126.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
127.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
128.	RESEARCHER	Summarises	
129.	CHILD	Agreement	
130.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
131.	CHILD	Closed question	
132.	RESEARCHER	Agreement; summarises	
133.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
134.	RESEARCHER	Facilitates speech	
135.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
136.	RESEARCHER	Checks understanding	
137.	CHILD	Agreement	
138.	RESEARCHER	Closed question	
139.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
140.	RESEARCHER	Closed question	
141.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
142.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
143.	CHILD	Gives information	Neutral
144.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
145.	CHILD	Gives information	Neutral
146.	RESEARCHER	Gives information; open question	Neutral
147.	CHILD	Registers information; gives information	Positive

148.	RESEARCHER	Checks understanding	
149.	CHILD	Agreement	
150.	RESEARCHER	Open questions	
151.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
152.	RESEARCHER	Closed question	
153.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
154.	RESEARCHER	Registers information	
155.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
156.	RESEARCHER	Closed question	
157.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
158.	CHILD	Gives information	Neutral
159.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
160.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
161.	RESEARCHER	Summarises	
162.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
163.	RESEARCHER	Gives information	
164.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
165.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
166.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
167.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
168.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
169.	CHILD	Gives information	Negative
170.	RESEARCHER	Summarises	
171.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
172.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
173.	RESEARCHER	Summarises	
174.	RESEARCHER	Open question; reassurance	
175.	CHILD	Gives information	Negative
176.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
177.	CHILD	Gives information	Negative
178.	RESEARCHER	Summarises	
179.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
180.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive

181.	RESEARCHER	Summarises	
182.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
183.	CHILD	Gives information	Negative
184.	RESEARCHER	Registers information	
185.	RESEARCHER	Summarises	
186.	CHILD	Agreement	
187.	RESEARCHER	Closed question	
188.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
189.	RESEARCHER	Open question	
190.	CHILD	Gives information	Positive
191.	RESEARCHER	Summarises	
192.	CHILD	Agreement; gives information	Positive

## APPENDIX 16: SUMMARY OF PEAK EXPERIENCE

### LAC Participant 1:

- Experience involved receiving a school commendation for good work.
- Particular reference made to maths lesson and success in completing challenging algebra.
- Recognition of achievement and independent work through school merits.

### LAC Participant 2:

- Drama lesson where a 'production' was being made.
- Child participated in a small group activity; teacher emphasised this was a hard task.
- Great sense of achievement when production was praised by teacher and peers.
- Group worked together well and came up with new idea; everyone was nervous but helped each other through.

### LAC Participant 3:

- First ever home economics lesson; pupil have never been allowed to use to cooker before.
- Great sense of achievement having baked a cake.
- Small group activity with peers, all working together.
- TA support was available which was perceived beneficial by the pupil.

### Teacher 1:

- Peak experience regarding the success of a child settling within a new care home and becoming part of the carer's family.
- Recognition of the positive impact in school.

### Teacher 2 and 3:

Within the paired interview, both of the teachers peak experiences related to the same key area (in relation to different children).

- Observing a child engaging in lessons and becoming part of the class; observably happy and settled.

### Teacher 4:

- The first occasion the teacher noticed a relationship had developed between with a difficult LAC when he 'missed' her whilst she was on a course.
- Relationship then became more positive and mutually engaging.

## APPENDIX 17: INTERVIEW ANALYSIS - MODES OF EXCHANGE [LAC]

### Interview 1

Researcher Data:

Mode of Exchange	Frequency (%)
Open questions (inc. focused open questions)	32
Closed questions	16
Multiple question (a)	2
Information (neutral)	2
Information (positive)	2
Reassurance (a)	2
Information	1
Understanding	7
Summarises	13
Seeks Information	2
Facilitates speech	2
Registers information	19

*Table 4: Interactional Process Analysis for Interview 1*

LAC Data:

Mode of Exchange	Frequency (%)
Closed questions	1
Information (neutral)	39
Information (positive)	40
Information (negative)	6
Agreements	10
Registers information	1
Laughs	3

*Table 5: Interactional Process Analysis for Interview 1*

## Interview 2

Researcher:

Mode of Exchange	Frequency (%)
Open questions (inc. focused open questions)	24
Closed questions	16
Leading questions (a)	1
Multiple question (a)	0.5
Information (neutral)	3.5
Information (positive) (c)	4
Reassurance (c)	0.5
Information	0.5
Understanding	5
Summarises	15
Agreements	17
Registers information	2
Empathy / psychological support (a, c)	0.5
Laughs (c)	0.5

*Table 6: Interactional Process Analysis for LAC Interview 2*

LAC:

Mode of Exchange	Frequency (%)
Closed questions	1
Information (neutral)	24
Information (positive)	38
Information (negative)	7
Understanding	1
Agreements	26
Laughs	1
Interrupts	2

*Table 7: Interactional Process Analysis for LAC Interview 2*



### Interview 3

Researcher:

Mode of Exchange	Frequency (%)
Open questions (inc. focused open questions)	37
Closed questions	13
Multiple question (a)	1
Information (neutral)	3
Information (positive) (c)	1
Reassurance (c)	4
Information	2
Understanding	6
Summarises	13
Agreements	1
Facilitates speech	4
Registers information	13
Laughs	2

*Table 8: Interactional Process Analysis for LAC Interview 3*

LAC:

Mode of Exchange	Frequency (%)
Closed questions	1
Information (neutral)	19
Information (positive)	47
Information (negative)	8
Agreements	18
Registers information	1
Laughs	5
Interrupts	1

*Table 9: Interactional Process Analysis for LAC Interview 3*

**APPENDIX 18: MEAN UTTERANCE DURATION [RESEARCHER / LAC]**

PARTICIPANT	NUMBER OF UTTERANCES	NUMBER OF WORDS	MEAN UTTERANCE DURATION (WHOLE WORDS)	PERCENTAGE OF INTERACTION (%)
LAC 1	99	1331	13	39
Researcher	110	2071	19	61
LAC 2	107	1810	17	55
Researcher	121	2251	19	45
LAC 3	85	864	10	32
Researcher	107	1867	17	68

*Table 10: Mean utterance duration for all participants*

**CUMULATIVE TOTAL** - The data above was used to calculate cumulative totals for utterance duration and percentage of interaction.

	MEAN UTTERANCE DURATION	MEAN PERCENTAGE OF INTERACTION
<b>LAC PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>RESEARCHER</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>58</b>

*Table 11: Mean scores for all LAC participants*

## APPENDIX 19: INTERVIEW ANALYSIS - MODES OF EXCHANGE [SCHOOL STAFF]

### Interview 1

Researcher:

Mode of Exchange	Frequency (%)
Open questions (inc. focused open questions)	23
Closed questions	15
Multiple question (a)	3
Information (positive)	2
Understanding	12
Summarises	17
Seeks Information	2
Registers information	22
Empathy / psychological support	2
Laughs	2

*Table 12: Interactional Process Analysis for Staff Interview 1*

Staff Data:

Mode of Exchange	Frequency (%)
Information (neutral)	11
Information (positive)	42
Information (negative)	28
Agreements	13
Registers information	1
Laughs	5

*Table 13: Interactional Process Analysis for Staff Interview 1*

## Interview 2

Researcher:

Mode of Exchange	Frequency (%)
Open questions (inc. focused open questions)	28
Closed questions	12
Multiple question (a)	2
Information (neutral)	2
Information (positive) (c)	2
Information	8
Understanding	8
Summarises	23
Registers information	14
Laughs (c)	2

*Table 14: Interactional Process Analysis for Staff Interview 2*

Staff Data (combined for both staff members):

Mode of Exchange	Frequency (%)
Closed questions	2
Information (neutral)	16
Information (positive)	38
Information (negative)	22
Understanding	2
Agreements	16
Laughs	4
Interrupts	2

*Table 15: Interactional Process Analysis for Staff Interview 2*

### Interview 3

Researcher:

Mode of Exchange	Frequency (%)
Open questions (inc. focused open questions)	22
Closed questions	15
Multiple question (a)	3
Information (positive) (c)	5
Information	3
Understanding	9
Summarises	25
Facilitates speech	2
Registers information	16

*Table 16: Interactional Process Analysis for Staff Interview 3*

Staff Data:

Mode of Exchange	Frequency (%)
Information (neutral)	11
Information (positive)	43
Information (negative)	36
Agreements	8
Registers information	2

*Table 17: Interactional Process Analysis for Staff Interview 3*

**APPENDIX 20: MEAN UTTERANCE DURATION [RESEARCHER / SCHOOL STAFF]**

<b>PARTICIPANT</b>	<b>NUMBER OF UTTERANCES</b>	<b>NUMBER OF WORDS</b>	<b>MEAN UTTERANCE DURATION (WHOLE WORDS)</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE OF INTERACTION (%)</b>
Participant 1	117	6501	56	86
Researcher	93	1026	11	14
Participant 2	263	3921	15	45
Participant 3	180	3015	17	35
Researcher	217	1751	8	20
Participant 4	103	5500	53	79
Researcher	86	1485	17	21

*Table 18: Mean utterance duration for all participants*

**CUMULATIVE TOTAL** - The data above was used to calculate cumulative totals for utterance duration and percentage of interaction.

	<b>MEAN UTTERANCE DURATION</b>	<b>MEAN PERCENTAGE OF INTERACTION</b>
<b>LAC PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>RESEARCHER</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>18</b>

*Table 19: Mean scores duration for all school staff participants*

## APPENDIX 21: FIELD NOTES FROM AI WORKSHOP

### DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE

Staff and student were asked to identify their dreams for the future, in this workshop we need to identify 'within-school' issue that we can address and agree actions:

- *Stable temporary care placements whilst the child is being placed*

Agreed actions:

- Social care issue beyond the remit of the school.
- No further action possible.

- *Overnight provision at school / respite provision*

Agreed actions:

- Beyond the scope of this thesis to effect change in this area.
- No further action possible.

- *Off-site nurturing provision / quiet room available in school - when child is experiencing difficulties managing school*

Agreed actions:

- Designated LAC to discuss current provisions within staff team and possible modifications i.e. learning support room (an alternative, supportive environment to support access to the curriculum); suite of rooms in learning support area; learning mentor; house room.
- Recognition that LAC gravitate towards form room - designated LAC teacher to confirm with all children provision available should they require 'time out'.

- *Greater opportunities for rewarding experiences i.e. small group bowling trips*

Agreed actions:

- Designated LAC teacher and staff all already considering amendments to the current reward system i.e. laser quest trips.
- Modification of whole school system and 'reward policy' being formalised.

- *All staff have a good understanding of the child and pre-care experiences*

Agreed actions:

- Effective briefing strategies to continue (i.e. annual briefing strategies re: LAC and safeguarding).
- Form tutor to have responsibility for sharing information regarding LAC at their discretion.
- Information available to all staff members through the school computer system (staff to reminded of these facilities).

- *All LAC have a named key-worker in school, who also becomes a point of contact for professionals*

Agreed actions:

- Form tutor to have responsibility to majority of LAC.
- Designated LAC to teacher to clarify named person with school and with outside agencies, at the earliest opportunity.

- *Good communication between all parties*

Agreed actions:

- Good practice to continue.
- School staff to feel confident and supported raising concerns regarding communication with senior managers.

- *Consistent approach across settings in supporting boundaries*

Agreed actions:

- Good practice to continue.
- School staff to feel confident and supported raising concerns within schools and with carers.



- *Be able to get help from other children (i.e. peer support), as well as adults*

Agreed actions:

- Current sixth form mentor system to be reviewed and expanded.
- For example, when LAC is linked with school mentor, the child could also be linked with a sixth form mentor.
- Designated LAC teacher to explore peer mentoring with school learning mentors.

- *For lessons to be fun - being able to do subjects you enjoy more*

Agreed actions:

- Continued variety of teaching methods.
- Continued with personalised learning.
- Designated LAC teacher to emphasise value of group work opportunities and peer support within staff briefing.

- *Less homework*

Agreed actions:

- Acknowledged there are occasions where modified expectations are required.
- In school provision to be promoted to LAC and to remain readily available.
- Need to acknowledge with LAC the importance of homework tasks to facilitate need for completion.

- *Teachers not to be 'too strict'*

Agreed actions:

- Through good communication regarding the needs of LAC appropriate behaviour management approaches should be used.
- Recognition that teachers need to continue enforcing rules and boundaries.

- *Make changes to the aesthetics of the school i.e. trees, more comfy chairs, better tables*

Agreed actions:

- School are continually seeking ways of improving the school building.
- Discussion re: designated LAC teacher exploring ways of utilising the voice of the LAC within this process.

- *Improved transfer process between 6 and 7*

Agreed actions:

- Designated members of staff are being allocated roles within the transition process and arrangements are being formalised.
- Identification at primary school visits re: transition; designated LAC teacher will identify house prior to child's arrival.
- Actions agreed regarding working closely with school EP to through feeder primary cluster meetings. School and EP to further liaise.

- *More time available within the designated looked after children's role to fulfil responsibilities, thinking space, proactive work*

Agreed actions:

- In an ideal world would be lovely! Recognition that there is little potential for creating change in this area.
- Acknowledgement that LAC within school are well managed and school are fortunate with the children they have.
- Agreed this is an action to reflect upon.

- *Clearer communication between schools and social services (i.e. response to referrals, greater liaison)*

Agreed actions:

- School generally happy with current systems in place.
- School have consistent approach to communication.
- School staff to feel comfortable and supported to raise concerns regarding difficulties with communication.

## **FURTHER ACTIONS AGREED:**

Through discussion of the provocative propositions further actions were also agreed:

- Importance on mindful planning regarding support available for LAC, to ensure it is both consistent and reliable.
- School to continue providing high levels of adult support; recognition that staff go to extra lengths of support children and build relationships to enable LAC to continue accessing support.
- Staff to continue promoting social skills development, particularly at a whole class level through the SEAL resources.
- School to further discuss the way safe risks can be taken by LAC - action for designated LAC teacher to discuss with pastoral leaders.
- GCSE revision books are given to all year 11 which are equally important for LAC.
- Designated LAC to amend rewards scheme with school staff as identified above, and, to reiterate with staff the need for meaningful praise for all children; this should be implemented consistently to ensure positive beliefs are confirmed.
- Morning briefings to continue and within school there are a number of means for communication: email, telephone, voicemail. Existing processes are working well. Designated LAC teacher to ensure staff are clear of communication processes and that they feel comfortable in raising concerns.
- Discussion around facilitating relationships with carers and existing good practice to continue i.e. contacting carers prior to the LAC transferring to school; invitations to school open evenings which are also attended by key staff.
- Continue with good practice re: PEP meetings, in particular, designated LAC teacher or head of house working with child prior to the meeting to collate their views and ensuring these are explored during the meeting,
- Senior leaders to support training requests within the school remit. Agreement that information from courses attended would be cascaded through the staff teams as appropriate.