

***'It's Just how I am... it's just the way I am'***

**The educational experience of young people looked after  
living in residential care**

**An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis**

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## **Abstract**

This study set out to explore the educational experiences of young people looked after living in residential care. Current research in this area identified that the data concerning the educational placements and outcomes for young people looked after had improved. However, there is a need for further research to explore the process of engagement with learning and the impact of relationship based learning on young people looked after living in residential homes (Brodie, 2009).

The present study used a qualitative methodology, encapsulating a case study method to hone in on the experiences of five young people living in a residential children's home. The young people were interviewed using a semi-structured interview method and their responses analysed utilising an interpretive phenomenological method.

The findings illustrated five superordinate themes. The first being that the young people valued their voice to be heard and acted upon; and they also needed a sense of social justice, space and privacy. The young people placed value on relationships in schools through having some sense of connectedness and intimacy which supported them reaching their potential and achieving their aspirations. In light of the findings I have also considered the role of Educational Psychology and how best to support young people looked after achieve better outcomes at a systems and an individual level.

Throughout the research I was interested in the experiences of individuals that are on the periphery of mainstream systems and experiences of social injustice that exist for young people at the margins. My post submission reflections made me come to the realisation that despite my best efforts I have not always been able to represent the true voice of the young people within this research.

## Glossary of terms

For the purpose of this research the following terms were used throughout.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Children and young people looked after (CYPLA)	A child or young person being looked after by their local authority. E.g. children in foster care, living in residential children's homes or other residential settings including secure units.
Residential Care	Children and young people living away from their family of origin with a care order and living in residential children's homes.
Education setting	for the purpose of this study education is taken to mean attending LA mainstream or alternative schooling, or education provided onsite at residential home.

### **Abbreviations Used:**

#### **C4EO:**

The C4EO is the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services. It identifies and co-ordinates local, regional and national evidence of 'what works' to create effective best practice in the delivery of services- C4EO is funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

#### **DfE and SFR:**

DfE- is the Department for Education. SFR is Statistical First Release- provides information about children looked after in England, for the year ending 2015.

## 1.0 Introduction

A dominant discourse in working with young people who are looked after is that if schools and the education systems provide a better experience, then we may see improved results compared to the ones that already exist. A predominant feature within the literature surrounding children and young people looked after are those of underachievement, social exclusion and disadvantage. Brodie (2009) carried out a systematic review of what works in improving educational outcomes for children and young people looked after. The findings highlighted that more research is needed in areas that differentiates the educational experience of different groups of young people looked after which examines the impact of specific interventions designed to improve educational outcomes. This is further heightened for young people in residential care settings and there is an absence of research examining children's schooling experience or that includes the views of teachers and other educational professionals (Brodie, 2009).

The definition of Children and Young People Looked After (CYPLA) is those under the age of 18 where the state acquires some parental responsibility. On the whole this relates to children and young people who have been removed from their parents care and placed in alternative care accommodation and supported at a wider level by extensive services both state and voluntary (Thoburn, 2010). The government's statistical first release (SFR) shows the national statistics in this area for 2015. The data shows that the majority of children looked after are placed with foster carers. In 2015 the number of children in foster care continued to rise; of the 69,540 children looked after at 31 March 2015, 52,050 (75%) were cared for in a foster placement. Out of the total of the 69,540 of these 6,570 looked after children were cared for in secure units, children's homes and hostels (DfE, 2015). Overall the national picture at present is that the number of children placed in local authority care continues to increase.

Research in this area (Brodie, 2009) posits that we need to develop a deeper understanding of the complexities of looked after children's experience in school. The aim of my research is towards understanding the complexities of the educational experiences as presented by the young people, by exploring how young people talk

about their own experiences of school. I intend to develop an in-depth understanding of the complexities of school life and examine the complexities that exist within the relationship dynamics in schools. It is hoped that by capturing the young people's views and experiences educationalists have a greater understanding of what education looks like from the young people's perspective.

The Children's Homes Regulations (DfE, 2015) sets out to improve care and outcomes of children living in residential homes. Therefore, this is a significant and relevant area to address due to the current priority that the local authorities are placing on the outcomes and experiences of children who are looked after living in residential care. Each local authority has a corporate plan for their children, young people and families which set out priority areas of development, one of which relates to the educational experience of children and young people looked after. This research is particularly important at a local authority level, due to the number of children in residential care, financial cost to the local authority, narrowing the educational gap and improving education outcomes for care leavers.

Educational Psychologists (EPs) work with schools, communities and multi-agency teams on individual casework and further develop their areas of specialist interest and research. More Educational Psychology Services are employing psychologists within their service who develop a specialist interest in, or responsibility for, children looked after which highlights that this group of children and young people are a priority for many Educational Psychology Services (Bradbury, 2006). Through their work it is likely that all Educational Psychologists, regardless of any specialism, will encounter and be able to support looked after children or professional networks working with them and Bradbury (2006) argues that Educational Psychologists are well placed to work with children in care and the supporting adults around them.

My interest in this area also stems from my past contributions to a specialist multi professional team within Tier 4, Children Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). I worked as part of a multi-agency psychological support service to deliver support for children looked after presenting with difficulties in schools. As part of this role, a frequent theme which presented was the difficulties that staff had in engaging young people in education.



The subject area was also particularly meaningful to me as somebody who is curious in trying to understand social injustice and how individuals are treated outside of the mainstream systems. For example, my experiences as a female minority group and as 'other' have shaped my views of inequality within institutions and systems, both educational and familial. I continue to want to explore issues of power and how individuals at the margins of society experience educational inequalities. My own personal experiences of secondary schooling have shaped this curiosity. I attended a predominantly white school in an industrial (ex-mining) town, which came with its own issues. One experience that stands out is how I was placed in the lower sets, so that I could be with the small number of other Asian children in the school. We were grouped according to our heritage and at that time this was viewed to be an inclusive practice.

Equally as part of my EP role, young people have often shared their dissatisfaction with school staff. CYPLA often share how adults lack an understanding of the complexities in their lives such as balancing the expectations of education whilst living in a residential setting. Whilst there is research in the area of achievement and outcomes relating to CYPLA there needs to be more said about the complexity of the education and care experience of young people living in residential homes. Therefore, research which helps to further develop the professional knowledge of EPs in this area is likely to be useful in awareness of the dynamics involved in educational expectations and young people's experiences.

The title of the thesis includes a direct quote from one of the young people and whilst it may appear that it is contrary to the views espoused in this research I was not able to move away from the force in hearing the words for the first time. The notion of '*it's just how I am... it's just the way I am*' demonstrates the view that for some young people their experiences do not lend them to want to change but for their situation, environment, and response of the adults to change.

Herein the first chapter set outs the research context and aims of the research. The second chapter presents a critical literature review in the area of CYPLA. The focus in this chapter is in relationship to early attachment and pre-educational experiences of CYPLA. Consideration is given to how these experiences shape CYPLA views of

relationships in schools, and the impact of living in residential care and accessing school. An attempt is made to draw out of the literature, the ways in which Educational Psychology can make the connections, and inform improved practice in this area.

The third chapter provides an overview of the justification and rationale for the chosen methodological approach. The application of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) and the process of interviewing, obtaining data and ethical issues are presented. In the final section, participant information and reflexive experiences for each interview are provided.

The fourth chapter presents the stages of analysis and interpretation, specific to the IPA process in the subordinates themes informing the superordinate themes.

The fifth chapter focuses on the findings and here there are direct quotes from the interviews to illustrate the way that the young people described their experiences according to each theme. The next chapter presents a discussion of these findings and sites this within the literature in this area. The focus in this chapter is to utilise the accounts put forward by the young people and apply them to inform EP practice. To this end, a secure holding base model is presented, by combining theoretical concepts with the young people's experiences this model tries to capture the overarching experiences as defined by the young people.

The final chapter concludes the findings of the study and considers the limits of the methods used in the current research. Suggestions are made for the development of future research and practice in the area of Educational Psychology and CYPLA living in residential care.

## **1.1 Research Aims**

I will give an account of educational experience which will further enhance understanding of the complexities of educational experiences of children and young people looked after. I aim to give first-hand accounts of educational experiences of children in residential care. This is a distinct educational experience and the

research aims to provide insights into a specialist area by giving an account of what is happening educationally for CYPLA at present from their perspective.

I used a case study approach and interviews were conducted using a purpose sampling method. The basis of the case study lies in an interpretive approach to social reality and in the description of the lived experiences of human beings (Willig, 2008) and is therefore suited to the current research study. A purposive sample was chosen which is a non-representative subset of some larger population, and is constructed to serve a very specific need or purpose. As the researcher I had a specific group in mind, young people looked after accessing education and living in residential homes. As the researcher I attempted to zero in on the participant group, interviewing whoever fits my criteria, is willing to give consent and is available.

The IPA methodological approach is adapted from Jonathon Smith (1997) who sets out a series of steps that allows the researcher to identify themes and integrate them into meaningful clusters within and across cases. The purpose is to identify common themes that arise through the interview process. The phenomenological method lends itself towards helping researchers to deconstruct the lived experiences of the participants. I found the methodological stance that best explained the complex interplay of the young people's experiences was one rooted in existential phenomenology. Here it is advocated that *'to understand human existence, we need to put to one side abstract hypotheses, analytical procedures and philosophical theories, and instead focus on human existence as it is actually lived'* (Cooper, 2003:11).

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Education and Looked After Young People**

The aim in this chapter is to critically examine current research surrounding CYPLA and their educational experiences. The subject area is broad and therefore the focus will be on issues specifically relating to literature that puts forward children and CYPLA's experience of relationships in school. This review will highlight the gaps in this literature, namely how to include the voices of the young people cared for in residential children's homes.

The key research messages contained in the area of education in relationship to CYPLA mostly focus on the outcomes being poor and this theme continues throughout. The Department for Education's statistics showed that in 2010 75% of all children in Year 11 achieved at least 5 GCSE's or equivalent qualifications at grades A\*-C, compared with 26 per cent who had been looked after continuously for at least 12 months (DfE 2010a,b). More recently the GCSE achievements are harder to measure due to a number of reforms. These reforms have had a significant impact on the 2013/14 GCSE and equivalent results data (DfE, 2014).

However, what we do know is that the percentage of looked after children achieving 5+ A\*-C GCSEs or equivalent including English and Mathematics was 12% in 2014. Additionally, the national statistics show that 68% of CYPLA eligible to sit GCSEs have a special educational need. The percentage of CYPLA with a special educational need achieving 5+ A\*-C GCSEs or equivalent including English and Mathematics was 8% in 2014, compared to 28.1% for those without a special educational need (DfE, 2014).

In the year ending March 2014 the DfE statistics show that there is a difference of 40.1 percentage points between the rates of children looked after and non-looked after achieving 5+ A\*-C GCSEs and equivalents including English and Mathematics. In 2014 the most common type of special educational need (SEN) for looked after children was 'behavioural, emotional and social difficulties', which accounted for 49% of looked after children at School Action Plus as their primary special need and

38.9% of pupils with a statement of SEN. Permanent exclusion rate was reported to be nearly twice as high as for all children. Outcomes into adulthood are also affected so that only 6% of young people in care attend university compared to 50% of young people in the general population (DfE, 2015).

Brodie's (2009) findings as part of the C4EO highlighted that more research is needed in areas that differentiates the educational experience of different groups of CYPLA. Additionally, there needs to be further research that examines the impact of specific interventions designed to improve educational outcomes for CYPLA. Brodie (2009) sets out 'what works' in improving outcomes for CYPLA and it systematically utilises existing research and key findings in this area. Brodie (2009) evidences that research in the area of CYPLA Education has increased in the past ten years, although this research does not capture the complexity at a local, regional and national level. A key finding looks at the data concerning CYPLA and their educational placements that suggests educational outcomes have improved, however, there is a need for further research including:

- Further discussion of theoretical and conceptual frameworks
- More cross disciplinary research
- More research involving schools and addressing learning processes
- More research that differentiates the education experience of different groups of CYPLA and examines the effects of gender, ethnicity and disability
- Research that examines the impact of specific interventions designed to improve educational outcomes for looked after young people
- Research designs that involve a wider range of methodologies

(Brodie, 2009: 3)

Notably, the information according to the SFR shows that the number CYPLA has increased steadily over the past seven years and it is now higher than at any point since 1985. Whilst the reasons why children start to be looked after have remained relatively stable since 2011, the percentage starting to be looked after due to 'family dysfunction' has increased slightly (16% of children in 2015 compared with 14% in

2011). The majority of looked after children – 61% in 2015 - are looked after by local authorities is due to abuse or neglect (Department of Education, 2015).

**Figure 1: Numbers of CYPLA from 2001-2015**

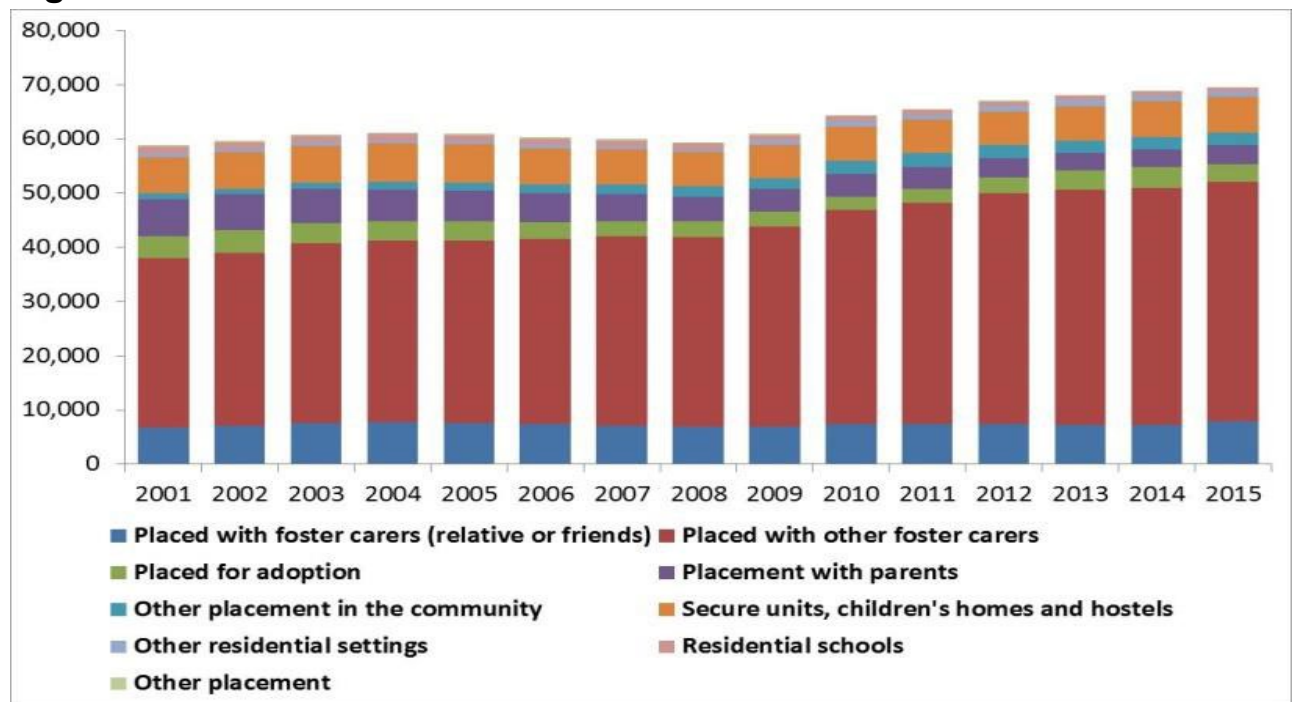


Figure 1: Source DfE SFR 34/2015.

Previously, researchers (Fletcher-Campbell 1998, Francis 2000) have sought to explain why life chances for young people looked after appear to be poorer than those of their peers. Others have explored the care experienced by young people's views and established their views about what made positive differences to their experiences and how they feel the situation can be improved for children in care (Martin and Jackson, 2002, Harker et al, 2003, Dearden, 2004).

More recent research carried out by Sebba et al (2015) as part of the Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education identified that young people transitioning from care also have poorer outcomes with regards to health and employment. Furthermore, that this group is over represented in the homeless and prison population. Their research sets out to consider the implications of educational attainment on outcomes for CYPLA as they recognise that whilst there is recognition that the attainment gap continues however less is known about factors that facilitate or limit educational progress for CYPLA.

Therefore for the purpose of the current study, the literature review focusses on what promotes positive outcomes for the young people and what inhibits these outcomes. Within the research there are also findings that present the young people's views on what constitutes positive educational outcomes and how do they compare with those of policy makers, children's services, educationalists and providers (Brodie, 2009).

The above themes will be explored in the literature review, through examining the experiences of CYPLA in education and the importance of relationships, both adult and peer support and the complexity of these interactions when living in a residential setting.

## **2.2 Attachment and Pre- Educational Experiences**

The educational experiences of CYPLA are mostly described in terms of poor outcomes, whether this is in relationship to academic achievement (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003, Berridge, 2008), school exclusion (Department for Education, 2010a, 2014), or experience of bullying (Evangelou et al, 2008). The recurring theme within the literature and evidence base is that poor early adverse experiences of neglect, abuse and trauma can have an impact on brain development, the development of executive functioning skills and on school achievement (Allen, 2008) There is also more likelihood of children's traumatic experiences pre-care and inside the care system impacting on relationships with others and these experiences are likely to impact on children and young people's ability to engage with education engagement and participation (Berridge, 2008).

According to McAuley and Davis (2009) 62% of children looked after by the state have experienced neglect or abuse whilst in the care of their birth parents. There is also the additional disruption to the attachment relationship when the child is removed and the child experiences separation and loss.

In examining the needs of CYPLA and the expectations set out within education policies and programmes it is important that consideration is given to the experiences prior to accessing any education system. Cairns (2002) argues that all CYPLA have had disrupted early lives leaving them vulnerable to attachment difficulties. Specific reference to this is in relationship to the impact of early adverse

relationships and the development of an internal working model. According to attachment theory, the kind of relationships that infants form with their carers affects and shapes how they view the world and their place in the world which is described as an internal working model (Bowlby, 1979).

Attachment by the child to its mother begins pre-birth in utero. The developing child grows accustomed to the pattern, routine and rhythm of the mother's life. As the child's senses develop, the child becomes increasingly aware of their environment, not only the immediate environment in utero, but also the impact of the wider environment outside the mother. The growing child will experience these effects both directly, for example when hearing sounds, as well as indirectly, for example through the mother's diet or changes in mood. It follows that a child's earliest attachment is always with its birth mother, even if the child is taken away from its mother at birth (Cairns 2002).

Klaus and Kenell (1976) propose a simple but succinct definition of attachment as: *'an affectionate bond between two individuals that endures through time and space and serves to join them emotionally'* (In Archer and Burnell, 2003:63).

Attachment can be described as a process that takes time. The key to its formation is trust and trust becomes secure only after repeated testing. The child learns to trust that his needs will be met in a consistent and nurturing manner and that the child 'belongs' to his primary care giver, and they to him. Reciprocity (the mutual meeting of needs, give and take) these must be consistently present for an extended period of time, for healthy, secure attachment to take place. It is through these elements, that a child learns to love and how to accept love (Gerhard, 2004).

Bowlby asserts ...

*'Evidence is accumulating that human beings of all ages are happiest and able to deploy their talents to best advantage when they are confident that, standing behind them, there are one or more trusted persons who will come to their aide should difficulties arise. The person trusted, also known as an attachment figure, can be considered as providing his or her companion with a secure base from which to operate'. (Bowlby, 1979: 103)*

John Bowlby wrote of the importance of attachment in the 1960/70s and further research has enhanced this understanding. Attachment is the attunement that



develops between an infant and his or her parent or carer. As an infant, a secure attachment provides safety, protection and closeness which is important for a young child. As the child grows and develops, a secure attachment is important for many other reasons, some of these are; learning basic trust, acquiring social skills and forming relationships; (i) developing a conscience which facilitates developing compassion and empathy, (ii) becoming resilient and resourceful, (iii) building trust and self-esteem, (iv) discovering personal strengths and recognising weaknesses, (v) understanding grown feelings and feelings of others, (vi) understanding consequences of behaviour both positive and negative, (vii) generally feeling ok about themselves and their place in the family, school and wider world (Adapted from Archer and Burnell, 2003).

Bowlby (1998) puts forward the need for carers to create a secure base in order to facilitate secure attachment in the early years. Essentially the secure base is the adult creating this in the form of being available so as to respond to the needs of the child and thus allowing the child to explore, develop and the child to return to the secure base if uncertain or anxious (Schofield and Beek, 2004).

It is helpful to think of attachment not as an 'all or nothing' relationship, but on a continuum ranging from secure with developing and enriching relationships between a child and a range of adults, to a complete absence of any such relationship. In other literature this absence has been referred to as *Reactive Attachment Disorder*, which is a psychiatric diagnosis (Horner, 2008). Educational Psychologists would be of the view that thinking of attachment in this way can unhelpfully lead to the assumption that the problem rests within the child, rather than being an interaction between the child's feelings of insecurity and the social environment in which they are living.

Research highlights that there is a need to adopt an education perspective that recognises the vulnerability of CYPLA, this means that we need to be more conscious of how adults create an environment for them which is socially and emotionally conducive to learning (Berridge, et al, 2008). It is possible that learning and developing for CYPLA may take longer, especially if their needs for safety, security and a sense of belonging have only been provided for incompletely.

Successful learning is built upon a confidence to take risks, which is itself built upon experiences of healthy attachment. Affect regulation as described by Fonagy (2002) is a helpful framework to consider the benefits of secure attachment and resilience. This begins with the caregiver offering care through 'affective mirroring' and direct communication of feelings which facilitates the development of healthy secure attachment. This cycle over time builds the capacity for using emotional intelligence in subsequent relationships (Schofield and Beek, 2009).

Disrupted attachments through abusive and neglectful parenting hinder the child from developing the above sense of belonging and the research focus from environment experience has significantly moved onto the impact of the attachment process on early brain development. Kraemer (1992) evidences the impact on early brain development and much of a child's emotional development is rooted in his relationships with his early primary caregivers. Kraemer (1992) goes on to highlight that aggressive, submissive and frustration behaviours may be genetically encoded. Schore (2003a) goes further and views the child's brain structures and growth of the brain being dependent on the mother child relationship. Both Kraemer (1992) and Schore (2003a) identify the foundation of the relationship with the primary caregiver, in that if the child experiences positive attuned caregiving then the child's cognitive structures learn to regulate, soothe and respond to the care. However, if the interactions are negative, disrupted and unreliable then the lower brain responses become dominant and the cognitive regulating structures do not develop to their full capacity (Kraemer, 1992). This impacts on the child's ability to control emotions and the ability to empathise with other's emotions (Kraemer, 1992).

It is when these negative interactions manifest into traumatic experiences of care that this can then lead to large inactivity in the pre-frontal cortex (Wilkinson, 2006) which is the part of the brain that is responsible for empathy, logic, cause and effect and reasoning. Essex et al, (2002) consider the impact of early stress and the damaging effect on later emotional development. They identify that the impact is greater if the child experiences emotional adversity early on compared to if they experienced the same care during adolescence.

From the outset, children that have experienced developmental trauma are expected to function in a limiting educational system which focuses on academic

achievements (Sebba et al, 2015). However the plasticity of the brain and the ability to develop alternative responses given new stable environmental experiences may lead the brain to adapt, which is helpful in the context of how and what we do to support children in educational settings (Scott, 2011).

Cairns (2002) describes the traumatic stress response as an automatic response to a realistic threat of danger. For a trauma to occur, there must be an event and a response which includes feelings of fear and helplessness. This may be triggered by a direct threat or witnessing violence (such as domestic violence). The limbic system immediately acts and floods the body with stress hormones. When this happens the brain stem and limbic system take over and the cortex and midbrain shut down. This means that the brain is practising survival over rational thinking. Cairns describes this as the 'Broca's' area which gives words to inner experience which also shuts down so people find it hard to describe what they have experienced (Cairns (2002)).

### **Critique of Attachment Theory**

Attachment theory in relationship to trauma presents a framework towards understanding CYPLA experiences of relationships and the impact of these experiences on their development of self. However, there is also critique levelled towards attachment theory with reference to viewing babies attachment styles as 'monotropic' in that babies are predisposed to forming only one primary attachment, usually the mother (Bradley, 1989). The research in this area has been questioned using findings from the Glasgow study in Bradley (1989) who identified that babies did not only form attachments to the main parent based on repeated patterns of care and proximity. Instead there was evidence to suggest that it was the responsiveness, and sensitivities related to the care being provided and the emotional availability of that carer which determined who the child became attached to.

*'These findings led to a transformation of attachment theory, a transformation in which adult responses to the baby became as important a factor in accounting for the baby's emotional development as the pattern of contact-promoting behaviour with which babies are born.'* (Bradley, 1989: 113).

This is also further highlighted by Ryzin (2010) where the focus moves towards secondary attachment figures and specifically in relationship to education. This

attachment figure is secondary outside the home and somebody that the young person views in the role of secondary parenting. This person responds to those unmet emotional needs that may be lacking for the young person at home. Ryzin (2010) found that 40% of the young people in his study named adults in an advisory role in school instead of their mothers as key attachment figures.

Scott (2011) proposes that practitioners should look beyond the disrupted attachment relationship prior to the child's care experience and also consider the complex process of interaction between child, carer and environment once the child is in a placement. Furthermore, that there needs to be an improvement in providing support for children and young people once in care to help them process their pre and in care experiences.

There is further critique in relation to viewing attachment as destiny for children and young people. This is specific to feminist critique of attachment theory in particular that the theory provides a cultural construction of self that is ahistorical and without current context (Cleary, 1999). Burman (2007) adds to this using a developmental paradigm to critique the strange situation as developed by Ainsworth (1969).

Mary Ainsworth tested Bowlby's theory of the "strange situation" by introducing children to a "stranger" in a new environment with the temporary absence of the primary attachment figure. This led to the description of three types of (secure, ambivalent, avoidant) attachment styles, and led to the question of what role did adults play in the development of patterns of attachment behaviour. How children behaved in the "strange situation" is reported to show a clear correlation between attachment style of the care giver and attachment pattern of the infant.

Burman (2007) argues that it seems paradoxical that children's success at adapting and gaining greater independence from their primary caregivers (mothers) should be treated as a measure of security. Additionally, that the strange situation does not take into account individual separation histories (Burman, 2007).

There are additional cultural biases which raise questions about the cross cultural validity of the strange situation as there are varying distributions across attachment classifications in different cultures. For example, Japan where infants are rarely separated from their mother, in this case it is argued that the strange situation may

not be a valid measure of infant-mother attachment (Nakagawa et al. 1992). There are also cultural variations in relation to the Western notion of the two parent nuclear family. In cultures beyond those in the West, a child may experience a variation in their experience of nuclear parent caregiving, and have a more communal experience of being parented.

Fonagy (1999) in his paper provides a detailed critique of attachment theory using a psychoanalytical stance. The main arguments towards attachment theory include that attachment theory is mechanistic, non-dynamic in its quality and that it's misrepresenting psychoanalytical concepts. Overarching themes within the critique include that the theory simplifies the unconscious motivational system underpinning behaviour and the emphasis is on early life. Additionally, that the theory ignores biological vulnerabilities of the infant other than those rooted in the primary caregiver (p. 449). That it fails to consider aspects of the parent-child relationship beyond separation and loss. However, there is recognition of the strength of attachment theory in describing representational systems that mediate relational behaviour.

Additional criticisms towards attachment theory specific to education are also towards the negative 'within child' discourse and constraining young people looked after with 'vulnerability' labels (Slater, 2007). It could be argued that there is a need for schools to create deficits for CYPLA to justify resources and provision. A move towards a strength based resiliency model when considering how some young people overcome and achieve despite their adversity seems to go against current attachment based educational approaches.

### **2.3 Being in school- the importance of relationships**

Studies in the area of CYPLA and the importance of relationships have highlighted the importance of the quality of relationships and the positive impact of having an attachment figure in school (Geddes, 1996). Recently there has been an increased emphasis on the importance of schools and education staff making a difference in the lives of children who have experienced trauma and loss. As well as the importance of the attachment figure helping the child to regulate their emotional responses thus reducing stress behaviours, there is also an emphasis on them helping children to build on friendships and peer relationships.

The importance of peer relationships within a developmental framework is examined further in this section but it also needs to be acknowledged that there is a dearth in research when examining this area and the experiences of CYPLA. There seems to be an over emphasis on the adult child relationship and reliance on adult child interventions which are essential in supporting the trajectory of resilience. However, there is under representation of research in peer relationships for CYPLA given the heavy emphasis on this within general developmental child psychology.

Developmental Psychologists Bukowski and Hoza (1989) start with the premise that children's experiences with peers contribute to the development of the self-concept. Hoza (1987) notes that this proposal can be traced as far back as the 1890's during the early days of American Psychology with William James writing about the adult self at the same time placing considerable emphasis upon social relations. Ideas similar to those of James are also evident in the writings of symbolic interactionists (Cooley, 1909, Mead, 1934 cited in Hoza, 1987). Cooley, for example, argued that at all developmental levels, people define themselves in term of their experiences in social situations. He placed particular emphasis on the family, the neighbourhood and the peer group.

Furthermore, as young people go through their childhoods they learn the different forms of power in relationships, Coleman and Hendry (2002) consider this as children viewing their relationships with adults as vertical with adults as the power holders. In this adult child relationship young people generally learn to accept and conform to the adults wishes. However, with their peers they have more freedom in the relationship with more equal status. Youniss and Smollar's (1985) identify that friendship with peers are based on a whole different set of structural interactions, with more reciprocity and evolutionary processes compared to their relationship with adults. They consider that there is a shift from early childhood friendships towards adolescence where there is more emphasis on intimacy. This move to intimacy involves a closer connection with a more 'exclusive focus' and sharing of issues in their lives. This experience of friendship helps adolescents to define their notion of self which is separate to how they are viewed by the adults. Increasingly young people challenge the authority and the control of adults at this stage and yearn for equality.

Additionally to a large extent, the intimacy of childhood and adolescent peer relationships may be seen as a continuation of early attachment relationships (Sroufe and Fleeson, 1986). Supporting this, in a study of thirty two preadolescents at a four week summer camp, Shulman et al (1994) found higher levels of competence in children who had been securely attached to their caregivers as infants, and corresponding differences in the quality of the friendships they established whilst at the camp. A number of studies have confirmed the relationship between current security of attachment and adolescent self-esteem (Patterson et al, 1995). Kerns and Steven (1996) found that late adolescent's maternal attachments were related to a measure of loneliness and the quantity of and quality of daily interactions but not the quality of friendships.

Recent research by Vincent et al. (2016) explore school as a micro space for friendship and relationship development. Their research considers the interplay of adult power and its influence on peer relationships within school settings. Specifically, they argue that when children are perceived as emotionally vulnerable they become the focus of the teacher's attention which then influence their ability to form friendships. Their research highlighted the need for children to have their freedom and agency in developing peer relationships outside of teachers' definitions and subjectivities of perceived emotional 'vulnerability'. They conclude that much of children's friendships and group workings are hidden from adults (including researchers) and thus it is difficult for adults to see what is *really* happening in the nuances of these relationships. Their research also identifies that school staffs use of reactive and targeting interventions miss the quieter exclusion and marginalisation of children (Vincent et al, 2016: 491).

However, Cairns (2002) views peer relationships with regards to the ability to show compassion. Cairns (2002) describes that from early on children are interested in other people. Children may not be able to distinguish between themselves and other people. Children who have unmet attachment needs who have not experienced reciprocal fairness and social reciprocity will find it hard to develop group connectedness. During adolescence the social group becomes more important and the need to belong to a group is important. At this developmental stage Cairns (2002) states that the child needs to grasp the essential elements of membership. If

there are unmet attachment needs with difficulties regulating stress and impulse this makes it very hard to become part of a group.

Given the hierarchy of skills needed to engage in peer relationships there is a definitive role for the attachment figure in schools to help facilitate this for CYPLA. It is important that this does not get missed as it is important that adults in school are aware:

*“Children with attachment difficulties can learn ways of adapting to adverse circumstances. We have a duty of care to teach these children social skills and rules necessary to fit in and connect with the majority of ordinary day to day life. One of the most important skills we can give to a child is the ability to form a relationship. Without this ability, can we truly live? We are intended to be in a relationship with one another. We are made that way.”*

(Bomber, 2007:221)

Peer relationships are additionally beneficial in acting as a protective factor in the context of school. Jackson and Martin’s (1998) research highlights that having friends outside care who did well at school amongst the protective factors that were identified as most strongly associated with educational success. Ridge and Millar (2000) add to this in putting forward that whilst peer support is important for all children it is particularly significant for CYPLA. Their research indicated that peer support provided social bonds that were absent in other familial environments such as those with siblings, relatives and wider in the family environment.

The importance of relationships with peers and adults is also further presented using a PACE model. The PACE model consists of Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy and proposed by Hughes (2009). Although based on therapeutic practices (attachment focused family therapy, dyadic developmental psychotherapy), Hughes (2009) considers the principles to offer a framework for building relationships, whether therapeutic or general, not simply for parenting, but as a way of relating to others. *“All children need relationships to thrive; traumatised children need relationships to heal.”* (p.17).



## 2.4 Discourse on Residential Care and Education

The most recent figures show that in 2014 there were 1,760 children's residential homes in England (Sands, 2016). The figures show that 21% of these homes were run by local authorities and the remaining 73% by private companies and 6% by the charity sector. Local authorities currently spend £1 billion each year on residential care (Sands, 2016: 3). Children and young people who are looked after and in residential care are a smaller percentage compared to children fostered and adopted. The reason for the majority (61%) of the children and young people placed in care was due to neglect and abuse with family dysfunction being the next most common factor (DfE, 2015).

The educational experience of young people in local authority care living in a residential setting are viewed as having poorer outcomes (Kendrick, 1998, Berridge and Brodie, 1998). However, whilst education is viewed this way more recently Kendrick (2013) highlights the decline in children being placed in residential care and considers positives identified whilst living in a residential home environment. Kendrick (2013) considers that increasingly homes are using family relationship models in the daily significance of 'doing' and 'displaying' family like relationships.

The local authority, when placing children into care, will primarily seek a foster placement and often residential care is viewed as short term or where disruption to an existing placement or several placements has already taken place (Kendrick, 2013). Cost has also played a part in the increase of seeking foster placements and Berridge et al (2011), in their study examining the use of social pedagogy in children's residential homes, identified that in 2010 the weekly cost of care in a local authority children's home was estimated at £2,689 per resident per week, compared with an average of £676 for a child placed in foster care.

The DfE (2011a) highlighted that there has been a decline in the use of children's residential care from 32 per cent of the care population in 1978, to 21 per cent in 1986, to only 9 per cent in 2010/11. Whilst more recent statistics show that the number of children looked after in England on 31 March increased in 2015 (Ofsted 2016), the percentage of children placed in residential care remain the same. The National Statistics show that CYPLA were most likely to find themselves in a

fostering placement. In 2016, three quarters of children were fostered (51,985) and 9% (6,031) were in children's homes. Boys and young men were twice as likely to be living in a children's home as girls and young women (Ofsted 2016).

Kendrick (2013) further supports the notion of decline in the use of residential placements and suggests that this is due to the contrast of the 'institutional' nature of residential care and the 'normality' of family placements. Kendrick (2013: 78) argues that it is the symbolic power of the family which is important in considering the way that young people view the family metaphor in the context of residential care. Wilson et al, (2012) also highlight this in their study of young people and family practices in difficult circumstances and the importance of creating, maintaining and attributing a narrative of family like relationships with service workers. The young people identified the workers practices and attitudes, rather than their own as an important factor in creating these relationships. Wilson et al, (2012) conclude the emphasis that the young people place on family-like relationships and the practical and emotional support that these relationships can provide which they can rely on in difficult circumstances.

Research undertaken as part of the former Department for Education provided detailed information on how children's homes functioned (Berridge et al, 2008). This study looked at children and young people presenting with 'severe behavioural difficulties' living in foster homes, children's residential homes and residential special schools. They found that of the three groups, children in residential homes had the most 'troubled histories' and a greater number of adverse circumstances. They argued that these histories and experiences need to be taken into account in understanding adjustment and engagement of young people in and outside of the residential placements.

Most notably, as well as the children's traumatic experiences leading up to care and then whilst in care before coming into the residential setting, there were additional barriers to overcome even before accessing education. These included difficulties in managing the expectations set out within the education system and the ways young people were viewed within the education system (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001). Also, the home environment with high staff turn overs, over stretched resources and a management hierarchy could all be factors that significantly impact on the young

person's emotional and educational well-being (Hatton and Marsh, 2007). There are additional stressors within the residential environment that include living with similarly traumatised, distressed and, at times, excluded young people (Whitaker, et al, 1998). Hatton and Marsh, (2007) also consider the lack of stimulus in some homes and there not being sufficient educational materials, books or an appropriate study area.

However, there were also many examples within the research that were encouraging in that the young people were positive about the care they received in residential homes. The study by Berridge et al (2008) highlights the quality of care that the young people receive and that many residents showed improvement on general measures of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and education.

*“These results suggest that children’s residential care might have the potential to make a more positive contribution”* (DfE 2010: 6).

In Sinclair and Gibbs' (1998) study they interviewed 200 young people in residential care and found that these young people were more likely to choose residential care than any other form of care. This included a high proportion who had already had foster care who still chose residential care in a preference of a ratio of three to one. There is also evidence that children and young people's views of residential care will also change depending on day to day factors including what's happening in the young person's lives but also factors within the home (Bolger and Miller, 2012).

The focus of the research discussed above has been on the relationships and the way the young people felt supported and cared for within residential settings. There seems to be the connectedness between the staff within the residential homes but it is the links with staff supporting the young people within education that has been missing. Research presented across these areas highlights the importance and the value that the young person places on the way that they are received, thought of and held in mind but there seems a lack of discourse around how the two spaces, residential home and school, can connect to give a similar message/messages to the young person. This seems even more important given the often fragmented nature of these children and young people's experiences of adults.

## 2.5 Experience of Education when living in Residential Care

There have been a number of research studies that elicit the views of young people in care and their experiences of education (Brodie, 2009, Sebba, 2015). The most recent research published in this area is was by Driscoll (2013) who carried out a small scale study which highlighted the experiences of young people. Driscoll (2013) states that these experiences included a strong sense of self-reliance, frequent changes of workers, bewildering amount of people involved and conflicting advice... *“lots of people were all like saying different things and it was a bit much really.”* (p.144). Driscoll concludes that in common with other studies, the young people’s narrative created a picture of ‘busy isolation, in which they were required to interact with many, but rarely able to establish close and fulfilling personal relationships’ (p.144). Driscoll advocates that from this and previous research there is a need for a return to relationship-based practices within children residential homes.

Other studies have also sought the views of young people within the care system and Harker et al (2003) carried out a study where they interviewed 80 children and young people who lived in residential and foster care about their educational experiences. The main themes within this research included the young people stating high levels of exclusion, too many changes and loss of friendships which all affected their ability to engage with school life. The experiences of the young people also showed there to be a lack of understanding by others, both peers and adults, in schools with reference to the care system. The young people were asked what might have supported better educational progress and their responses included having one key person showing an interest in their education, space to study and resources at home and, above all, the young people wanted to be consulted with about their views.

The theme of friendships and the importance that young people attributed to them, as having a protective factor is reported in Dearden’s (2004) small scale study with 15 young people in care. She concluded that what young people identified as helpful included: strong supportive friendships and adults help in making these; adults listening and responding to bullying or abuse both at home and school; and both of these alongside strong links between home and school.

Brodie's (2010) review puts forward key messages from the research that already exists and in this CYPLA views are:

- Receiving emotional and practical support that enhances their self-esteem, sense of belonging and emotional wellbeing.
- The quality of their relationships with foster carers, childcare workers and other professionals (particularly social workers) is crucial: they value being part of a family where they feel loved, and are treated as a member of their foster carer's family.
- They want social workers who are reliable and accessible.
- They want to stay in contact with family members and friends of their choice.
- They want to have their achievements valued and recognised, and also to be reminded of the possible consequences of not reaching their potential.
- They want to be offered a choice of accommodation when they move to independence, in a location where they feel safe, secure and supported, and with access to transport, education, employment and amenities.

(Adapted from C4EO, 2010)

Transitions are also highlighted within the research as an essential component to consider for CYPLA specific to education. Transitions can be at best difficult for most children however the transient nature of CYPLA lives means that this transitional period is an additional stressor that can trigger past experiences of poor endings (Dent and Brown, 2006). Research carried out by Brewin and Statham (2011) provides further insights into what factors support the transition from primary school to secondary school for children who are looked after.

In the study by Brewin and Statham (2011) 14 CYPLA were interviewed and a number of individual factors, environmental factors and external factors were identified as contributing to the transition process. Interestingly they identified a theme that is presented throughout this review and that is one of friendships. Around half of the teachers and carers put forward that the children in their care had difficulties in making and maintaining friendships with most attributing these difficulties to the child's social skills. The children also viewed friendships as an important factor in helping with the move from primary school to secondary school.

The move to their new school was either helped or hindered by the presence or absence of friends. A clear message elicited from this research was that the young people did not want to be singled out for 'help' and did not want to be singled out in front of their peers. This research clearly highlights the need for practitioners to include the voice of the child and locate it centrally within existing macro-systems and support structures that already exist.

There have been a number of studies that have also elicited CYPLA's views in the area of school exclusion. School exclusion rates for CYPLA are the highest when compared to any other group and recent statistics show that CYPLA are ten times more likely to receive permanent exclusion compared to non-looked after children and young people (DCSF, 2010). Research by Borland et al (1998) and Brodie (2000) described the poor experiences of education for young people in residential care but also the higher rates of school exclusion and non-attendance. These studies both highlighted that staff in the homes were less likely to challenge exclusions and were often unaware of the processes of exclusion and general school systems.

Brodie (2000) researched school exclusions over three local authorities for a group of 6-16 year old boys living in residential care. Brodie interviewed young people and the professionals involved in their cases and from these interviews identified ways in which children accommodated in residential care come to be excluded from school. This study helps to develop our understanding of the process by which young people come to be excluded from school. Furthermore, it identified the many 'informal' ways that these young people were excluded and the way this was managed by professionals. Brodie's study concluded that there were huge differences in the ways that professionals understood the educational needs and the difference in the levels of understanding could determine the outcomes for the child.

The most recent research in this area was carried out in 2015 by Sebba et al as part of the Rees Centre. Researchers carried out an international systematic review in 2015 to evidence what is the relationship between being in care and the educational outcomes of children. The findings of this review set out to consider if there was a relationship between being in care and educational outcomes, what the nature of the

relationship was and if there was causality. The review concluded that there was a strong association between the two variables.

*“Furthermore, the evidence appears to suggest that when risk factors relevant to young people in care are taken into consideration and methodologies that aim to eliminate selection bias are adopted, being in care does not appear to be harmful to children’s academic performance.”* (Sebba et al, 2015: 13).

## **2.6 Resilience and CYPLA**

Rutter (1999) defines resilience in the context of child development as *‘relative resistance to psychosocial risk experiences’* (p. 119). A number of studies have focused on the importance of resilience when planning interventions for CYPLA (Botrell, 2009; Newman, 2004; Gilligan, 2000; Rutter, 1999) and the protective influence it can have on resilient trajectories which are usually missing from children’s lives in other areas of their care (Greenen and Powers, 2007; Leeson, 2007). Education is viewed as a place that children can have the same consistent experience of adult care which if positive, can enhance self-esteem and self-efficacy (Rutter, 2006; Hagell, 2007).

The expectations on young people to have consistent positive experiences of education and the over reliance on resilience as an internal ‘within’ child factor could be detrimental in understanding young people’s experiences. In examining resilience, Luthar and Cicchetti (2000:58) refer to it as *‘a dynamic process wherein individuals display positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma’*.

The emphasis within CYPLA’s education experiences is on protective factors that enhance positive outcomes such as having at least one advocating empathic adult and having an overall successful experience of school. Driscoll’s (2013) study outlines the above and she provides a framework with reference to the period of leaving care and transition to adulthood, recognising this time may provide a ‘turning point’ for positive change. The study highlights the many ways that young people experience supportive relationships and the impact that this has on their developing resilience:

*“A Resilience framework provides an attractive lens through which to consider the trajectories of vulnerable young people, because it acknowledges children’s agency and can incorporate the effect of interaction between the child and their environment, in addition to focus on strengths and competence rather than deficits and maladjustments.”*

(Driscoll 2013: 146)

In the same research Driscoll (2013) puts forward evidence that this is not a straightforward experience for young people and that protective factors could be as a result of chance rather than planning in education. Again this can be dependent on which adult took the lead in the planning and reviewing.

The impact that the interventions have on CYPLA’s resilience have also come under criticism as the outcomes continue to be poor (Cameron and Maggin, 2009). The ways that CYPLA are currently supported in the education system and the over reliance on resilience could create a mismatch of what the young people experience and what adults supporting expect in terms of academic performance. If current support systems are not effective, as reflected in the research in this area, then consideration needs to be given to the experiences of young people and adults that provide the support so that there are further insights into what factors promote good outcomes and what factors limit them.

## **2.7 Informing Practice- Educational Psychology making the connections**

*‘We believe that the greatest gains in reforming our care system are to be made in identifying and removing whatever barriers are obstructing the development of good personal relationships, and putting in place all possible means of supporting such relationships where they occur.’* (House of Commons, 2009:27)

Research examining Educational Psychologists role in supporting CYPLA is limited although this is changing (Educational and Child Psychology, fostering, adoption and looked after children, Volume 28, issue 3). Most notably the research in this area highlights the importance of EPs in facilitating relationships and providing ways of adults helping young people experience relationships through emotional warmth, psycho-education and therapeutic re-parenting (Midgen, 2011 and Cameron and Maginn, 2011). Further research by Ubha and Cahill (2014) presented interventions that Educational Psychologists could explore using an attachment based framework



in schools. Their research highlighted the importance of attachment based interventions and the need for 'secure bases' in promoting children's emotional well-being in the school context. They reiterate the need for EPs to work in a dynamic, creative and more innovative ways when working with vulnerable groups (Ubha and Cahill 2014:287).

Research in the area of EPs supporting educational placements for CYPLA in residential settings is further limited and hence the literature review has focussed on findings from research that is currently available. This has been in the area of staff working in residential care and not specifically in an educational setting. This research can inform EPs in their practice and what changes are needed to facilitate transformation in this area.

In examining the issues surrounding CYPLA's experiences of education from an Educational Psychology perspective consideration has to be given to the current economic and resource restraint placed on schools and families. Throughout the present study the focus will be on looking at what is effective given the limited resources available. The research will also aim to highlight how the notion of support and intervention can be balanced with the reality of restraint and austerity.

The focus of EP work in supporting CYPLA can be to increase knowledge for school staff through training and presenting the evidence base as discussed in this section. However, given the constraints in the system as it is and what is being requested in terms of knowledge development within schools is not necessarily what will implement change for CYPLA. I would argue that knowledge is not the same as understanding and the conduit to improved change is creating a space for reflective, contained, empathic understanding. How can EPs facilitate this space in schools, this is an area that I set out to explore through listening to the lived experiences of the young people living in residential homes.

## **2.8 Summary**

My rationale for the research stems from the key messages within the literature surrounding CYPLA which are those of underachievement, social exclusion and disadvantage. This is further heightened for young people in residential care settings

and there is an absence of research examining children's schooling experience or that includes the views of teachers and other educational professionals (Brodie, 2009). Research findings highlighted that more research is needed in areas that differentiates the educational experience of different groups of CYPLA and research that examines the impact of specific interventions designed to improve educational outcomes for CYPLA.

Brodie (2009) has identified the need for further research in this area and posits that we need to develop a deeper understanding of the complexities of CYPLA's experience in school. My aim is to contribute to this area of research by exploring how young people talk about their own experiences of school. I hope to develop an in-depth understanding of the intricacies of school life and examine the complexities that exist in the relationship dynamics within schools.

Additionally my interest in this area also stems from my past contribution as an EP to a specialist multi professional team within Tier 4 CAMHS. I worked as part of a multi-agency psychological support service to deliver support for CYPLA with mental health issues in schools. As part of this role a frequent theme presented was the difficulties school staff had in engaging young people with education. Equally the young people often share their dissatisfaction about the school staff and their lack of understanding of the complexities in the young person's life. Therefore, research which helps to develop the school staff and EPs understanding of CYPLA and their educational experience is likely to be useful in furthering understanding of the dynamics involved in adults expectations around education versus the young people's experiences

I hope that the current research will give an account of educational experience and will deepen an understanding of the complexities of educational experiences of CYPLA. I will put forward an experiential narrative according to the young people and inform Educational Psychology practice. I also hope that the interview process will give the young people an opportunity to share their experiences/stories and for their voices to be represented. Educational Psychologists are well placed to contribute in this area (Bradbury, 2006) and further research by practitioners will allow more valuable insights into a specialist area by giving an account of what is happening educationally for CYPLA at present.

## **Research Questions**

- What are the educational experiences of CYPLA living in residential care?
- What accounts of school based relationships do the young people put forward?
- How can EPs support better outcomes for CYPLA in residential care?

### **3.0 Methodology**

The research design and chosen methodology will be presented within this section and a rationale for my research design will be put forward with justifications for the chosen methodological approach.

#### **3.1 Justification and rationale for Methodological approach**

A qualitative methodological approach is used in the current study, more specifically, a case study method using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The study is one that starts from a humanist and existential premise in that we are beings trying to find meaning in this world. As the researcher, I will be trying to make sense and interpret the meaning of experiences presented using a qualitative methodological approach.

All research is essentially looking for meaning and extending the research lens beyond facts and empirical data. In using this approach the researcher is trying to access, hear the voice and share the voice of their participants. Willig (2008) puts forward that the object of this type of research is to describe and possibly to explain events and experiences, but never to predict (Willig, 2008:9). This is taken further within this research approach in that the presentation of any research findings is located within my own positioning. I am mindful that no research is 'pure' in its widest sense or bias free despite the positivist researchers quest for this to be achieved in all studies.

The interest in this research is in accessing young people's voices and their experiences of school and the relationships within school. The qualitative methodological approach is the tool used to access these experiences. The epistemological stance used is a critical realist one in that, as the researcher, I am aware that within my findings I will never access what 'really matters'. Sayer (2000) considers critical realism and how this stance can facilitate research in the social sciences to question the validity of the constructs that are being studied. Furthermore, the need for research to consider societal constructs of gender, race, disability and apply criticality to ensure emancipatory research.

The critical realist stance is one whereby I am trying to uncover power and lend voice to those without power and contribute to emancipatory research. However, whatever I access will be flawed and imperfect as inevitably, I will be implicated in this research in that my biases and experiences and the issues of power will influence the process despite any best efforts in trying to limit this. At best, I will gain further understanding and possible insights in to what is 'real' as experienced by the young people and the 'meaning' that they attribute to these experiences.

The focus of the current study is the experiences of CYPLA living in children's residential homes and initially an interest in discursive psychology appealed as a way of trying to distinguish these experiences from those in other care situations. Discursive Psychology focuses on people living their lives and studies how meaning is constructed, understood and displayed as people interact in everyday and institutional situations (Wiggins and Potter, 2008). Moreover, discursive psychology is not examining technical processes involving interaction but is concerned about categories, constructions and orientations through which a sense of agency is displayed in a piece of interaction within a certain setting (Wiggins and Potter, 2008). This is not about discourse but an interest in the psychology of language as a topic that impacts on understanding, prejudice and social influence. I was particularly drawn to the stance that people are social and rational beings and psychology is a practice rather than an abstract and out of reach process.

### **Methods Considered**

Further consideration was given to the work of Potter and Wetherell (1987) and discourse analysis which originates in Social Psychology. Discourse and Social Psychology initially appealed as it focused on conversation and analytic work on both every day and institutional settings and drew on the post structuralist ideas within Foucauldian tradition of Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn and Walkerdine (1984). Potter and Wetherell (1987) developed the notion of interpretative repertoires from Gilbert and Mulkay's work (1984). Their work explores clusters of terms organised around a central metaphor (Potter and Hepburn, 2005a).

The above areas draw heavily on constructionist sociology of scientific knowledge and focuses on categories and descriptions and the way they are involved in actions. Edwards and Potter (1992) developed the theme of what is 'reality' (fact) and what is

'in the mind' (thoughts, feelings, attitudes) and that people construct versions of both of these in their talk and actions. Wiggins and Potter (2008) propose three core observations; firstly that discourse is constructed and constructive. Constructed as it is made up of linguistic building blocks, words, categories and idioms etc. The second main principle is that discourse is action orientated- talking and writing are actions- more than just actions in themselves "*Discourse is the primary medium for social action; in speaking we blame, justify, invite, compliment, so on*" (Wiggins and Potter, 2008:77). Thirdly discourse is situated within a sequential environment and words are understood via what precedes and follow them- talk is occasioned within a setting, school, family, office. "*Thus to understand discourse fully, one must examine it in situ, as it happens, bound up with its situational context*" (Wiggins and Potter, 2008: 77).

The epistemology in the above description of discursive psychology has been in the sociology of scientific knowledge and there is a more sceptical position on issues of truth and knowledge than is common in conversational analysis. Discourse analysis is more than a method as it provides an alternative way of conceptualising language and it can inform us of the discursive construction of social reality, (Billig, 1997:43).

Social constructionism as a paradigm lent itself to the current research as it regards the social practices engaged in by people, and their interactions with each other. An example of this is presented by Burr (2003), she describes that a child with a learning difficulty is pathologised by traditional psychology by locating the difficulty within the psychology of the child. The social constructionist would challenge this by looking at how the learning difficulty is a construction that emerges through the interactions between the child, their teachers and others.

*"Social constructionism therefore relocates problems away from the pathologised, essentialist sphere of traditional psychology"* (Burr, 2003:9).

Furthermore, Burr (2003) argues that social constructionism would regard objectivity as an impossibility, since each of us, of necessity, must encounter the world from some perspective or other (from where we stand) and the questions we come to ask about that world, our theories and hypotheses, must also of necessity arise from the assumptions that are embedded in our perspective (Burr, 2003). No human being can step outside of their humanity and view the world from no position at all, which is

what the idea of objectivity suggests, and this is just as true of scientists as of everyone else. Burr (2003) goes on to describe that the task of the researcher, therefore, becomes to acknowledge and even to work with the researchers own intrinsic involvement in the research process and the part that this plays in the results that are produced. Additionally, that the researcher must view the research as necessarily a co-production between themselves and the people they are researching. For example, in an interview it can be readily seen how the researcher's own assumptions must inform what questions are asked and how, and that the interviewer, as a human being, cannot be seen as an inanimate writing pad or machine that records the interviewee's responses uncontaminated by human interaction. In addition, facts themselves can never be impartial. Burr (2003) proposes that the questions asked are always the product of someone asking a particular question, '*these questions always derive from, albeit often implicit, assumptions about the world*' (Burr, 2003: 152).

These approaches had validity with regards to the current research and their contributions were considered in depth. However the above approaches did not lend themselves when considering the double hermeneutic structure needed to explore experience and the meaning of these experiences on the individual. Smith and Osborn (2003) describe the double hermeneutic process as the researcher trying to make sense of the 'sense making activities' of the participant. The social constructionist approaches were limited in assisting the exploration of inductive meaning grounded in the idiographic data required in the current study.

Alongside these approaches, narrative inquiry was also an approach that was considered as a research tool in the present study and particularly, narrative orientated inquiry. The appeal for narrative techniques was due to the method seeking to elicit participant's stories. The approach also proposes that, when participants are asked to share their experiences, that they invariably use a narrative mode. The method uses an open ended interview structure and the approach considers that when the individual's share their experiences that they organise their accounts into a story structure (Hiles and Cermak, 2008). The narrative approaches have their roots in the social constructionist and phenomenological methods which complemented the current study.

The narrative orientated inquiry approach provides an in-depth rich and illuminating picture when considering the persons experience in the context of their biography. Holloway and Jefferson (2000) advise that the approach is used in a way that elicits the individuals' experience which is as naturalistic as possible. The process of data gathering is described, at best as free association which is specific to the psychoanalytical approach. The approach has a heavy therapeutic focus and whilst I have an interest in this approach in the EP work that I do, I was reluctant to extend it to the current research. Specifically I was concerned that I would be using a therapeutic data gathering tool, whilst not have an ongoing relationship with the young people nor the people supporting them in the residential settings. This approach had ethical implications for this study as the young people would be sharing their stories without the necessary follow up support in place.

### **3.2 From the Social Constructionist to the Phenomenologist**

Husserl (1859-1938) first described phenomenology through forming a philosophical phenomenological method rooted in existentialism (Langdrige, 2007). The formula was one where the researcher starts the process using a wider perspective based on perception of experiences. The interpretative tradition in relation to phenomenology began with Heidegger (1889-1976), who began as a phenomenologist.

Phenomenology focuses on the fact that if something cannot be described then it cannot be interpreted or indeed analysed. The concern is with the meaning and the way in which meaning is made of in the person's experiences.

Phenomenology is interested in extracting what appears and the manner that it appears; it views no two peoples experience as the same and focuses on individual interpretation of events. It studies the person's experience of the world and details description of the person's consciousness to extract meaning from their experiences (Willig, 2008: 54). Langdrige (2007) highlights that the approach relies on interpretation and is essentially a philosophy that influences epistemology and ontology by influencing knowledge through its development.

*"Heidegger, in particular was not terribly concerned, at least in his earlier work, with what we can say we know about human nature (Epistemology) but instead was concerned with establishing the truth about our very existence (Ontology)."*  
(Langdrige, 2007:25).



The essence of this work is rooted in Heidegger's notion of human beings existence and the empirical investigation and the facts related to this existence (ontics). Separate to this ontological refers to 'being' or 'existing'. Human beings, or *Dasien* (*being in the world*) can only be revealed through philosophy. Interpretative Phenomenology examines the nature and the quality of phenomena as it presents itself. It draws insights from a hermeneutic tradition in that all description constitutes a form of interpretation for application of method (Langdridge, 2007). There may be such experiences that they cannot be described despite them having been experienced by the individual. For example, Giorgi and Giorgi (2008) point out that these experiences may be bodily ones, traumatic and over whelming experiences. This is true to the current study as the experiences of CYPLA education living in residential care can have its own ethical and methodological dilemmas. In that there will be overwhelming experiences that are not readily shared by the young people in the current study. The fact that these experiences have not been shared should not negate interpreting those that have.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a version of the phenomenological method that accepts the impossibility of gaining direct access to research participant's life experience. It explores a participants experience from their perspective but recognises that this will implicate researchers own view of the world. Therefore any interactions are only an interpretation of a person's experience. Its founder Jonathon Smith (1997) sets out a series of steps that allows the researcher to identify themes and integrate them into a meaningful set of clusters within and across cases.

IPA works with transcripts of semi-structured interviews that essentially are open ended and not directive so that the interviewer can enter the life world of a participant without bias. Essentially, focused questions are about elaborating rather than checking whether a participant agrees or disagrees with a phenomenon. There are four stages to the process and the purpose of each stage is to interpret overall themes starting with reading and re-reading of text; then making comments and notes before eliciting and labelling themes and finally building structure into the analysis and producing a summary table. Integration of cases and data collection method will be purposive sampling whereby participants selected according to

criteria of relevance to the research questions. Groups are homogenous in that they share experience of events (Willig, 2008).

IPA does have high levels of criticism directed towards its use, mainly in that it works with texts and uses language as a way of extracting meaning and experience. It assumes that language provides the participants with the tools to capture that experience. Willig, (2008) argues that the phenomenological research methods are not suitable for the study of the experiences of those that may not be able to articulate them in the sophisticated manner required by the method. This can be counter criticised as it assumes that the researcher's use of language is more superior in its use and instead researchers and academia needs to be more accessible to gain insights from lived experience. IPA examines lived experiences of the participants world but does attempt to explain why the world is constructed the way it is. It could be viewed that IPA is using a social cognition paradigm in that it attempts to analyse what the individual thinks or believes about the topic under discussion (Smith, 2011).

Additionally, it takes on a relativist approach to knowledge production. IPA subscribes to a relativist epistemology in that the knowledge being generated cannot be objectively verifiable. It views and identifies that the respondent's views are interpreted according to the researcher's thinking and conceptions. These are not seen as biases but instead viewed as a necessary pre condition to making sense of another person's experience. In other words, understanding requires interpretation- and reflexivity. This is where psychological meanings are constructed through the deep examinations of unique individual lives. This is done through comparing cases by looking at nuances and intersubjective experiences of similar events (Eatough and Smith, 2008).

*“Idiographic methods explicitly address the subjective and interpersonal involvedness of human emotion, thought and action, and the messy and chaotic aspects of human life, in the hope of getting a better understanding of the phenomena under investigation.*

(Eatough and Smith (2008) In Willig and Stainton-Rogers, (2008: 183).

A concern with IPA is how the experience was constructed and lived by the individual and how reality appears to the individual. IPA has a natural affinity with

narrative enquiry- how the world is constructed not simply how we tell the story. Participants are encouraged to re-interpret their lived experiences so that their lives become more liveable. The participant is viewed as the story teller rather than respondent. The interviewer can be dynamic and move away from the schedule to pursue the participant's narrative. The researcher is not disputing the words that are used but doing psychological thinking about them (Smith et al, 2009).

It (IPA) differs from narrative approaches in that it takes on the notion that the researcher is the analytical instrument (Fadé, 2004). This is done through the process involving examining, investigating and deconstructing the phenomena in a way that brings new psychological and social understanding in order to get closer to the essential experience of the participant. Essentially going beyond the surface and considering layers of meaning that approach a more essential understanding of the phenomena in the data (Moustakas, 1994).

### **3.3 IPA: The Process and Application**

*'When I first articulated IPA in the mid 1990s (Smith 1996), the motivation was multifaceted. First and foremost, I was championing a type of psychology which had a central concern with attempting a rich and detailed portrayal of personal experience. This was because psychology, as pointed out by Kaptein and Todorova, had patently failed to do this.'* (Smith, 2011:56)

Smith (2011) puts forward a robust justification for the use of IPA in psychological research and argues that *"without a centring in individual lived experience, there is not IPA"* (p. 56). The focus and emphasis is on promoting the use of IPA to gain insights and make sense of a person's stories.

*"So IPA can and should connect with extant literature. And the dialogue can take a number of forms. In relation to existing work, IPA will sometimes be deconstructive, sometimes illuminated, often a mix of all three. The form of the debate depends on the nature of the research question and the predilections of the researchers".*

*(Smith, 2011: 57).*

In spite of its rich history and roots in hermeneutics and phenomenology, the origins of IPA in its most current form is relatively new in that it was put forward as a specific approach to qualitative research in the mid1990s (Smith, 1996). The use of IPA in research studies can be found in health psychology, nursing and now more so in clinical, counselling and social psychology (Willig and Stainton-Rodgers, 2008). The

focus of these studies is the 'lived experience' and the way in which the participant is interpreting and feeling this experience according to their world. This is then rigorously analysed using a systematic approach to find the idiographic nature of the experience but to also what is shared and is a common experience amongst the group (Ried, Flowers and Larkin, 2005).

The method used to collect the data is usually semi-structured interviews and the data collection is dialogical with the participant having a central role to directing and determining what is said. Despite this, Eatough and Smith (2008) also propose that the researcher does not allow the participant "*a strong say in where the interviewer goes, otherwise it jeopardises the phenomenological endeavour*" (Eatough and Smith, 2008:188).

Interpretation of the data from the interviews has an analytic focus towards understanding the meaning and to do this it adopts a set of common processes are adapted which are described as an iterative and inductive cycle (Smith, 2007). Furthermore, the interpretative process can be initially descriptive using the commentary, helping the researcher to form an 'insider perspective' and moving towards constructing and layering of interpretation to formulate a deeper hermeneutic reading of the experience (Smith et al, 2009).

*"This means that there is a balance of 'emic' and 'etic' positions in IPA. In the former (phenomenological insider) position, the researcher begins by hearing people's stories, and prioritises the participants' experiences and concerns, and to illuminate them in a way that answers a particular research question."* (Reid et al, 2005: 22).

The process that enables the above to happen is through coding and presenting an overview of themes, hierarchy and then to structure the cluster of themes which will be further described in the analysis section of this research.

### **3.4 Validity and Reflexivity**

In attempting any research, the researcher should be asking why this subject, what is it that the world needs to know that it doesn't already? Within this there is also the question, why should I tell the story? How will I share the story that is free from bias and do justice to the experiences shared? The research and philosophy that we (as psychologists/educationalists) access is rooted in Western concepts including

European imperialism and colonialism which historically served 'the haves' and excluded the 'have nots'. This point is further examined in a recent Guardian newspaper article which asks the questions 'does philosophy have a problem with women?' This point could be taken further and the same could be asked with regards to race? In this article Mary Warnock (2015) comments that there is a complacent assumption that sexism in research and philosophy is 'minor and residual'. She goes on to quote Haslanger:

*"In my experience it is very hard to find a place in philosophy that isn't actively hostile towards women and minorities, or at least assumes that a successful philosopher should look and act like a (traditional white) man."* (Baggani and Warnock, 2015).

As highlighted earlier my own positioning as researcher could be considered unique, as a female within an ethnic minority group and having had experience of 'other', also by being subject to 'marginalisation' within the education system. I was acutely aware not to be led by personal experiences and to 'bracket' my own pre-existing perceptions (Smith et al, 2009) so that I could focus on the participants. I was able to adopt reflexivity within the context of the current research, in that I was mindful of my positioning and I was able to acknowledge how my own experiences could influence the study. I was also willing to explore the influences, meaning and feelings that the research was evoking. One area where this proved the biggest personal challenge was when moving away from the personal aspects of reflexivity and towards academic *epistemic reflexivity* (White, 1997). Whereby there is a need to question and be critically aware of how academic writing and discourse serve to position the author as expert and the information presented as fact located in truth. I would go back to my earlier point in asking who is constructing these truths, a point that needs to be explored when we see written accounts of minority groups produced by indigenous philosophers, researchers and authors.

In considering the validity of the current research Yardley's (2000) guidelines were adopted to ensure rigour. Yardley (2000) sets out four key areas that all qualitative research should adhere to. The four areas relate to sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact. Each area will be presented here to demonstrate that the research has undergone a thorough process in order to warrant validity of the findings.

In order to ensure sensitivity to context, the researcher is asked to consider a number of different aspects, including theoretical context and previous research in the area. In the present study I carried out a search using academic databases (Psychinfo and STAR) ensuring that the research accessed was of a high standard. Yardley (2000) also identifies that sensitivity relates to the relationship between researcher and participant. In the current study power and the balance of power could be a potential issue which was acknowledged through building rapport with the participants, putting them at ease and being led by them.

The second and third points put were to demonstrate commitment, rigour and transparency and coherence. Effort was made by me to ensure that despite my full time commitments as an EP and then a change of role mid research to another service my commitment to the research was not lost. My findings and interpretation are clear and cogent with the voice of the young people clearly present throughout. My analysis gives detailed direct extracts of participant's accounts and it is hoped that the richness of the responses is not lost.

The final point as identified by Yardley is related to impact and with regards to the current study this is evident within the findings. The findings in this study illustrate what is important as experienced by the young people and what educationalists need to change when it comes to current practice. If we are to pay more than lip service to pupil voice then we need to turn to studies where young people have been given space to share their most intimate thoughts and feelings and had their voice actively listened to.

### **3.5 Case Study Method and IPA**

The qualitative interview method using a case study approach was chosen as the most suitable approach towards gaining insight into the participant's views and experiences for this research. The case study forms part of the qualitative research methodology which is a form of social enquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live. In the words of Atkinson et al. (2001:7) it is an 'umbrella term', and a number of different approaches exist within the wider framework of this type of research. Primarily, social science researchers use the qualitative approaches to explore the

behaviour, perspectives, feelings and experiences of people and what lies at the core of their lives. Specifically, ethnographers focus on culture and customs, grounded theorists investigate social processes and interaction, while phenomenologists consider the meanings of experience and describe the processes involved (Kvale, 1996). Moreover "*The basis of qualitative research lies in the interpretive approach to social reality.*" (Holloway, 1997:2)

According to Cohen et al (2003) the case study approach involves the use and study of a variety of empirical materials and Rose and Grosvenor (2001) also put forward that this methodology is useful in the exploration of change or conflict. The basis of the case study approach lies in the interpretative approach to social reality and in the description of the lived experiences of human beings.

It should be noted that researchers who take these approaches do not always use the term 'qualitative research', they adopt different labels. Some call it naturalistic inquiry, field research, case study approaches, interpretive or phenomenological research (Bryman, 2001). Others seem to use the term ethnography as an overall name for much qualitative research, for instance Hammersely and Atkinson (1995). Although there are differences between qualitative approaches (Creswell, 1998), it is sometimes difficult to find clear distinctions between them even though they can be important. All qualitative research, however, focuses on the lived experiences, interaction and language use of human beings (Potter, 1996).

With regards to the case study method adopted in IPA, the focus is at an idiographic level of analysis (Smith, et al, 2009). The case study method within the current research study would allow us to hone in on the lived experiences as described by participants in the two residential settings. The case study for this research would be adopting an ideographic perspective where the concern is on the particular rather than the general.

### **3.6 IPA and Interviews**

There is a vast amount of literature within social sciences that examines qualitative research techniques in particular the interview method which is described to yield

valuable insights into people's life experiences, attitudes, opinions and aspirations (Rose and Grosvenor, 2001).

*“Interviews enable participants- be they interviewers or interviewees- to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view. In these senses the interview is not simply concerned with collecting data about life: it is part of life itself, its human embeddedness is inescapable.”* (Cohen et al, 2003: 267)

While this may seem rather a broad dimension, only certain types of interviews are of direct value to social scientists as a research tool; although every type of interview could be construed as being of interest to the social scientist in one way or another as the narrative of an individual's lived experience. Smith et al, (2009) suggest that the focus of IPA is to elicit rich and informative data from the stories that the participants are able to share and semi-structured interviews are the preferred means of collating this data. The space created in one to one interviews allows participants to share their thoughts, feelings and to be heard (pg. 57). Smith et al, (2009) acknowledge that no interview situation is without its problems and nor are they under the illusions that only 'true' accounts are accessed within the interviews- but the aim is to understand the participant's world view.

The interview process as described in IPA should reflect the hermeneutic circle, in that the interviewer shifts their enquiry according to what is being shared and that they are not simply going from one question to the next in a linear way. This shift is also embodied in the analysis where the process is iterative- influencing and shifting our thinking in relationship to the data as well as the enquiry (Smith et al, 2009).

The interview process should acknowledge that what is being shared at face value is not necessarily uncovering the full meaning, thoughts, feelings and private self (Silverman, 1998). Kvale (1996) highlights criticisms that need to be considered when using the interview method which include the centrality of the individual to the process without considering the social context. Additionally, Kvale argues that the interview takes place in a vacuum and not in the real world where the focus is not actions but words. IPA does go further than other approaches in addressing these issues through ensuring reflexivity whilst acknowledging that no research can be bias free. This is further embedded in IPA techniques by the researcher firmly



situating themselves in their research and by interpreting and explicating meaning. The researcher aims to go beyond purely descriptive accounts of their findings from the interview data.

### **3.7 Procedure**

The procedural part of this research was the most difficult part of the process as understandably, there was initially notable caution amongst residing authority staff and in particular those deemed with loco parental responsibility. Issues included how would I make contact with the young people in the residential homes? How would I explain the processes of consent, withdrawal and ensuring confidentiality?

The following procedure was adopted and I underwent a rigorous ethical review process both as part of the university and the Local Authority which were both approved (see appendix 1 for approval letter). The research proposal was presented to all of the Local Authority children's homes managers so that full consideration of the issues, concerns and questions were addressed beforehand. One of the recommendations from the managers was to carry out an initial pilot study questionnaire that the staff would use with the young people to gauge interest in participating in the research study. The questionnaire (see appendix 2) was piloted and the response was that, although the young people expressed their views, only five from two children's homes agreed to take part in the research further. A point that I reflected on was in the way that the staff presented the research to the young people. A potential standardisation issue at this stage is in the way that the young people were asked to engage with the questionnaire and research.

Once I had received the questionnaires, I then made contact with the children's home managers to check that they had gained initial consent from each of the young people. I explained the aims and method of my research and made arrangements to contact the young people about potentially taking part within this research. I then followed this up with a letter which explained the research content (see appendix 3). I also checked if the young person had any particular access requirements.

### **3.8 Recruitment**

I carried out an initial visit at the two homes to see if the young people and the managers/keyworkers still wanted to take part. At this point I gave a verbal explanation of the project and offered the young people the opportunity to ask any questions that they may had.

Following this initial meeting, the young people were left with the information letter and my contact details, should they had wanted to ask any additional questions. I also offered a follow up meeting with them (if they wanted to do this), in which I could answer any additional questions and talk them through the consent form and they could accept or decline to participate. I hoped that allowing a few days between these meeting gave the young people an opportunity to think about the study, whether they had any more questions and whether or not they would like to take part. I wanted the young people to be assured that they were able to contact me in between meetings and that if they felt uncomfortable declining to take part in the study in person that they would not attend our second meeting. I chose to give them this option, as I am aware that there would have been potential power differences between myself as a researcher and the young person.

### **3.9 Consent**

I considered a number of factors in relationship to obtaining informed consent in terms of the young people and their carers. The processes that were considered and followed are listed below:

- Telephoned the residential home manager with a brief verbal explanation about the research project.
- Sent an information letter (see appendix 3) and consent form (see appendix 4) to the residential homes manager. The residential worker gives informed consent- repeat this process (where appropriate) with the child's birth parents/social worker (depending on parental responsibility).

- I asked the young person's residential keyworker to initially speak to them and share the letter about the research.
- I waited for the carer to inform me that the young person was interested in finding out about the study I then obtained informed consent from the young people by the following the process outlined below:

After my interviews I was able to meet with the young people to check that they still gave me consent to continue with their findings and also to thank the young people individually. This gave me the opportunity to ask again for consent to use their words within my thesis and to check whether they felt that their identity had been adequately disguised and if they would like me to exclude anything that was said within the interviews.

Participants were told verbally at each stage of the research and also had in writing that they have the right to withdraw their consent at any time. Participants were also told about and given in writing details about how to make a complaint should they wish to do so. I always endeavoured to make it clear that each participant's involvement in the research was valued and that the participant's views were respected.

### **3.9.1 Managing Risk**

I was mindful that I could potentially trigger past traumatic events in discussing and asking participants to consider their early educational experiences. Additionally, the semi-structured interview method which I used employed open, semi-structured conversations. As such I was aware that it can be difficult to predict exactly which school (or other) experiences participants will choose to talk about within these interviews. It is possible that within these interviews we may have touched on and talked about potentially sensitive subjects and potentially difficult and challenging issues may have been raised. Talking about these experiences may have brought back feelings of distress or upset from the past. However, it is important to note here that throughout I emphasised to participants that they could terminate the interview at any time, that they could choose which experiences to talk to me about and they did not have to answer any questions or tell me anymore about anything raised in the interviews if they do not wish to do so.

Additionally, the time that the participants spent involved in the research through our meeting and interview or their thinking time may be potentially inconvenient for them. I made sure to arrange the meeting at a time and location which they deemed to be the most suitable and convenient for themselves.

I made sure that I carried clear photo identification (from Sheffield University and my Local Authority) in all meetings with participants and other interested parties (such as social workers, residential workers and birth parents). Before participating, people were informed of the telephone and email contact details of me and my research supervisor, if they wished to make a complaint, withdraw their consent or if they had any other concerns or queries.

Prior to the research interviews I clarified to the young people both verbally and in writing that they would not have to answer any question or questions that they were uncomfortable with and that they could stop the interview at any point. I also had my questions checked by various colleagues and my supervisor to make sure that I was not probing into any aspect that was sensitive in relationship to the young people's lives. I made sure through checking of my questions and the use of my reflective log that I created a safe space and that the young people were safeguarded and protected from any harm. I carried this out through explaining my research and the importance of confidentiality in all aspects of the research; my approach throughout was one that utilised a non-judgmental, empathic and attuned response. I demonstrated a high positive regard towards the young people and was fully aware of the issues of power. If any issues arose I discussed them with my supervisor so that any effects were recognised and the impact minimal.

The interviewing process could go in any direction and I was mindful that the young people could choose any aspects of their lives and disclose in relationship to the question being asked. If the young person felt uncomfortable in any part of the interview I respected their need for silence or to move on or change the subject. An issue that was at the forefront throughout was the potential of the young person becoming distressed because of the sensitive, personal and upsetting nature of their experiences. In order to protect and ensure that my participants came to no harm I had planned what I would do if these situations arose. I planned that if the young person became upset, distressed or displayed a strong reaction then I would ask

them if they needed me to stop the interview or pause for a break. I made sure that I carried the contact details of a range of support services (such as counselling) that I was able to signpost the young person to, if needed.

The other area that I planned for is if a young person made a disclosure of abuse or any other safeguarding disclosure, past or present. I also considered if they were at risk of significant harm and this came out in the interview process. I am legally bound to follow Health and Care Professionals Council (HCPC) and the local authority's safeguarding procedures and to immediately pass this information on to their social worker. I explicitly stated this duty to the residential staff and the young person before the start of the interview and if this situation had arose, I would have had to carry out this duty. At the start of my interview I also reminded the participant of my responsibility to do this. I also planned for the situation whereby if the young person was showing signs of physical or psychological distress that the participant was unaware of, I would communicate this to the participant and I would have signposted to an appropriate agency.

I also reflected (See reflexive box for each participant) that within the interview sessions potentially distressing issues may arise and be discussed and that participants could project these feelings towards me. In order to ensure that I fully considered, planned and prepared for my participants safety and wellbeing I sought regular supervision from my research supervisor.

### **3.9.2 Confidentiality**

When consent was obtained and the above instructions confirmed participants were recruited to take part in the research project. The participants were made aware that any information that they shared during the interview process and throughout the research, would be treated in the utmost confidence. This debriefing process was important in creating a sense of a safe space and a feeling of mutual trust. All of the participants were informed of the nature and aims of the research. This was to make sure that any efforts by the participants to make their own sense of the research and reply with answers that they believe to be desirable instead of making authentic and descriptive ones.

Consent was obtained before carrying out the semi-structured interview. The completion of the interview took place in a quiet room within the residential home in either the living or dining room with a member of staff nearby. The participants were administered a set of semi-structured questions by the interviewer (see appendix 5). All answers were recorded and permission for this was also obtained from the participants prior to the interview. Finally the participants were thanked for their time and co-operation with the research and any questions were answered.

### **3.9.3 Ethical issues**

The ethical implications for the participants needed to be considered throughout the research process. At all times the participants were protected from harm and their well-being respected. In order to fulfil the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics and to make sure the participants do not come to any harm the following issues were considered for this research.

#### **Ethical guidelines adapted from the BPS (2010)**

##### **Valid Consent**

The participants were fully informed about the objectives of the investigation so that if they had felt uncomfortable about the research proposal, they could have chosen to no longer participate.

##### **Deception**

Deception tactics were not used to make the participants comply and participate. The participants were delivered the true aims and objectives of this research. The participants were pre-briefed upon completion of the interview as well as debriefed prior to commencing the interview. The participants were fully aware that this research sought to explore their educational experiences.

##### **Withdrawal**

From the very beginning the right to withdraw at any time during the investigation was made clear to the participants.

##### **Confidentiality**

In light of the highly personal information elicited from the interview context, confidentiality was fully ensured and respected. Guarantee of anonymity was also given. All names mentioned were converted and pseudonyms were used instead.

### **Protection of participant**

Throughout the research, care was taken not to expose the participants to risk of any sort. Hence the decision to present the participants with the interview guide prior to interviewing. This was an attempt to alleviate any possible anxieties that could have been present from the onset of the research.

### **3.9.4 Participants**

In this study five young people co-operated with the questions from two children's residential homes. I have limited the amount of information provided in the profiles so as to keep the anonymity of my participants and to ensure that they could not be identified in the research process. An individual profile has been outlined of each participant (all names have been changed):

#### **Carl**

Carl was aged 17 and described that he had attended many schools prior to him accessing an apprentice course at College. Carl described his primary schooling as being more positive than his secondary schooling where he underwent a number of exclusions. Carl was permanently excluded from 2 schools and finished his secondary schooling at a pupil referral unit with some access to alternative education. Carl came into care at a young age and had some contact with birth family members at the time of the research. Carl's needs in school related to his social, emotional and behavioural responses to situations and some underlying learning and speech communication needs.

#### **Kameron**

Kameron was aged 19 and studying at College and he described that he disliked school. Kameron shared that his needs were around managing

strong emotions for which he was receiving 'anger management'. Kameron has achieved GCSEs. Kameron came into care during his adolescence and he was continuing to process the circumstances around this.

### **Charlotte**

Charlotte was aged 15 and receiving an alternative education package. Charlotte shared that she has always hated school. Charlotte came into care in her early teens. Charlotte wanted to take part in the research but struggled to engage in the process. The process of recording limited Charlotte in engaging and if I had been able to find alternative ways of gaining Charlotte's views, I would have had richer information in terms of her experiences.

### **Kay**

Kay was 17 years of age and studying at College. Kay had experienced exclusions at school. Kay was a carer to her siblings and came into care in her secondary school years. Kay really engaged in the process and wanted her views to be known and wanted things to change for young people in care.

### **Chloe**

Chloe was aged 15 and attending a mainstream secondary school. Chloe described her primary schooling as poor and preferred her secondary school. Chloe had to move secondary schools when she came into care. Chloe had been in a foster care placement prior to coming into the children's home.

## **3.9.5 Reflexive boxes**

The reflexive boxes follow on from the observations, feelings and reflections from the interview. I recognised that there needed to be space to process the interviews with the young people and to capture feelings that presented during the time I spent with the young people. Each reflexive box takes into consideration the process involving



each individual. For the purpose of this study the information is presented in the context of this chapter in order to facilitate the idiographic and case study process of inquiry.

### **Reflexive box 1**

#### **Reflections from the interview with Carl:**

Carl found it difficult talking about some areas of his schooling and would go quiet so I was unsure when to continue to probe. He reported that he was ok in continuing talking about his experiences. At times some of his early memories were evoking emotions and he became subdued- we worked through this and I gave him space and supported him in continuing to talk. Carl was very proud of his current work situation and felt that work suited his needs better and that school was a means to an end in achieving qualifications to get work. Carl had many experiences of exclusion and talked through his 8 different schools that he attended.

Understandably some of his experiences were blurred as he was trying to recall what felt like difficult experiences. I was able to identify themes early on within what Carl had shared.

I found that at times I asked leading questions and felt that Carl repeated what I had said so I revisited this when I became aware that this is what I was doing and would ask the question in a different way. I found that I was hesitant in asking about Carl's early life in too much detail as I would want him to be more familiar with me before sharing this. I would ask Carl to share what he was comfortable with but did not want to overly probe as I could see his non-verbal behaviour changing as he would stretch or fidget. In some ways I recognised that this was something that needed to be revisited and a follow up interview may have addressed this. I was mindful that these were my thoughts and that Carl could have either liked talking about his experiences or found it tedious to have to go over them again.

My rapport with Carl seemed good from the outset and we talked about his achievements since school and also about his family. Carl was keen to show me a

photo of his baby cousin as he was visiting him after we had finished the interview. He shared that he was looking forward to meeting up with family and that this was important. Carl was keen to finish the interview and get on with his plans and reported to be happy to be asked the questions for the research.

## **Reflexive box 2**

### **Reflections from Interview with Kameron**

Kameron was comfortable as far as I was aware in my presence. He had just woken up and was coming round from his sleep. He was eating breakfast and brought his breakfast in with him when he talked to me. Kameron was hesitant in expanding on some of his answers especially those relating to his difficult times. Kameron would look at me to give indication that he did not want to expand on some of the painful memories from the past. Kameron preferred questions relating to his current situation as he found it difficult to talk about his past.

Kameron reported that he was reluctant in talking about his feelings in general and he finds it especially difficult to open up. He shared that even the most skilled staff in the home didn't know his feelings. He identified that there was one member of staff that would recognise his mood and ask him- he said that this member of staff knew exactly his feelings. It felt like Kameron was trying to indicate that he would be giving away very little and this was understandable given his likely experiences.

Kameron opened up as we went along and when the tape recorder was off he was much more animated and talked about how he related to me interviewing as he also did this as part of the care council. He told me that I did well as it is difficult and nerve wracking. Kameron was much more accepting of me asking questions outside of the interview situation and despite my reassurance during the actual interview it felt that a conversational approach would have been helpful in gaining his views/experiences further. Kameron also asked how long my interview with the other young person in the home was and asked how long he had spoken in comparison.

Interestingly I stayed around the house slightly longer during my second visit so that the young people could ask me anything and also so they become familiar

with me. Kameron used this opportunity to talk some more and had a great conversation about cars and the cost of insurance for cars.

### **Reflexive box 3**

#### **Reflections from interview with Charlotte**

Charlotte was in a bad mood as her social worker had cancelled a visit to see her and she was notably upset about this. Charlotte was talking to a member of staff at the home about this. I was around and she asked what I was doing and wanted to know why I was there. I explained and said that I was there to ask some questions for a research project about young people's experience of school and Charlotte wanted to know more. Charlotte also asked me if I had seen anybody eating her Weetabix and she told me that the other young people kept taking her food.

Charlotte said that she was ok for me to read the participants letter to her and signed the consent forms. Charlotte responded with 'its shit' when asked about her experiences' of education. When asked to expand she said she didn't want to and that she wasn't in the mood. I asked if she would like for me to come again and she said she would but not to make it the following week as it was her birthday week. We agreed that I would come late evening the week after as she would prefer this.

Charlotte also wanted to know what the other young people had said and especially Kameron. Charlotte did not like it when I asked about her previous schools as she said where do you want me to start, I've been to about 20! She said if I wanted to know which ones I would need to look at her life story book. She was genuinely affronted about this question and we managed to repair but I felt that with Charlotte I would have to increase my rapport and be around the home.

### **Reflexive box 4**

#### **Reflections from interview with Kay**

Kay was keen to be part of the study from the outset and vocalised clearly what adults should do in order to support young people in schools. Kay readily shared her experiences relating to school and her relationships in the home. I found that Kay had experienced a number of losses and during the interview I wanted her to feel reassured that I empathised with her situation. I reflected back to her about

how difficult her experiences must have felt. Kay seemed to value my unconditional positive regard of her experiences.

On a personal note Kay was the young person whose story stayed with me and I kept, and have kept on reflecting on the points that she shared. I continue to think about what we can learn from her experiences. In writing up the findings I was mindful that Kay's voice was the loudest and a direct quote from her is included in the title. However, this is not to say that the other young people's accounts were not regarded in the same way but it was Kay's engagement in the process and her need to be heard that I value in this research.

## **Reflexive box 5**

### **Reflections from interview with Chloe**

Chloe had previously been in a foster home and had moved into the residential home more recently. Chloe was adjusting to the noise, hustle and bustle in the home. I was keen to try and put Chloe at ease and I took some drawing, teen colouring in tools with me in case she needed them during the interview. Chloe chose not to use them but laughed that I thought that she would. Chloe seemed to like my preparedness and over time relaxed and I was able to establish good rapport.

Chloe asked if I was nervous about undertaking the interviews as she knew how nerve wracking school projects could be and I agreed with her. Chloe at times became distracted by the noise outside of the room. I frequently asked her if she would like to continue and she would be quick to answer with yes and that they (people outside of the room) annoyed her. I went back to visit Chloe as I did with all of the young people to check with regards to consent and share initial findings. During my visit the home manager was present and Chloe looked genuinely pleased to have been part of the research. The home manager congratulated both her and Kay as both lived in the same home. Both were visibly pleased to have been part of the process and it did make me wonder if the process had a positive effect in terms of their relationship in the home.

## 4.0 Analysis and Interpretation

The aim of this section is to identify and put forward the findings from the interpretive analysis. This chapter will put forward the superordinate themes and consider the subordinate and master themes that led to the formation of the findings. The themes will be illustrated by using extracts from the transcripts. The table below lists the subordinate theme according to the superordinate theme and broken down into individuals experiences as they were shared within the interviews. The table provides an illustration of the reoccurring theme and whether it was apparent within each extract.

### 4.1 Stages of Analysis

The interviews were analysed using the IPA techniques that are set out by Smith et al, (2009). Whilst there is no definitive prescribed method of analysis when using IPA, Smith et al, (2009) do provide a format that allows the researcher to use a heuristic framework for analysis (Smith et al, 2009: 80).

The first stage involved transcribing and then reading and re-reading these transcripts to become familiar with the voice and experiences shared by my participants. This was then followed up by making initial notes which focused on the meaning and commenting on the thoughts, feelings and experiences that the participants were describing. At this point, I had to refrain from examining the extracts at a deeper level and had to try to avoid becoming overly interpretive at this early stage.

The second stage involved developing emergent themes and here I did give myself permission to become more involved with the data applying the principles of the hermeneutic circle (*“where the part is interpreted in relation to the whole; the whole is interpreted in relation to the part”*, Smith et al, 2009: 92).

Table 1 shows a sample of data during stage 2 of my analysis demonstrating the emergence of themes within the young peoples’ narratives:

## 4.2 Table 1: Emergent themes

Emergent Themes	Transcript for Carl	Initial notes
<p>Personal blame. Feeling bullied. Negative perceptions.</p> <p>Not heard. Not listened. Not cared for. Feels Pain.</p> <p>Transient- school moves.</p> <p>Engaged.</p> <p>Negative feelings. Aspirations relating to education.</p> <p>Visual of feeling small and teachers with the jobs- tall. Aspirations to achieve.</p> <p>Turning to adults. Feeling helped. Problems and needing to talk. Empathy?</p>	<p>C: My school experiences at certain schools weren't very good. I didn't get along with a lot of people. I was being bullied and just like arguments with teachers and it just went out of order.</p> <p>M: How would you describe these experiences?</p> <p>C: I wasn't being listened to and I wasn't being truthful because I was in care and my brother was in the same school as me and certain circumstances happened for him. Some of the schools I went to I got on with the teachers and got on with my work.</p> <p>M: Would you say that was a lot of the time or bit of the time?</p> <p>C: It didn't really happen a lot of the time and I didn't get on with a lot of my teachers</p> <p>M: How did that make you feel?</p> <p>C; They made me feel small like I wasn't worth it like I wasn't going to get a job when I was older.</p> <p>M; Was there anybody that did something that was different?</p> <p>C; There was my technology teacher he tried to help me, he knew I could go far and he helped me , like he gave me extra lessons and if I</p>	<p>Those that are in the school- adults and the way they make Carl feel. Carl attributes his negative feelings to his behaviour.</p> <p>Carl has internalised others view?</p> <p>Power imbalance. Invisible needs and comparators- labelling. Sibling's needs. Need to say that not all bad- limits details.</p> <p>Feelings relating to these teachers?</p> <p>Not getting on with adults. When probed- not main experience/memory? Feeling small- 'not worth it'- attributes to job- future. School as a place that is about future identity-job. 'Going far' important.</p> <p>Adults dismissing potential.</p> <p>Adult that helped- time helped. Talking to that teacher helped- being kept in mind by an adult. Teacher's awareness of Carl' situation?</p>

<p>Adult Advocating. Being available.</p>	<p>had a problem I could go talk to him.</p> <p>M; Was there anybody else and what did they do? C; There was somebody else, they helped me through it, they stuck up for me and just kept me out of trouble and they were just by my side really.</p>	<p>Helping adult. Standing up for his needs. Psychological proximity 'by my side'.</p>
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The third stage involved providing a structure for the analysis by looking at patterns across the emergent themes and identifying connections between them to create the subordinate themes (Willig, 2008). The final stage involved the grouping of the subordinate themes to create the superordinate themes. Here it was important to consider how each participants experience is separated and that their individual voice is not lost in the process of trying to 'fit' and be categorised into a superordinate theme. The dilemma as Smith (2010) points out is trying to retain an idiographic focus on the voices whilst making claims for the larger group.

*“Doing IPA with numbers of participants constantly involves negotiating this relationship between convergence and divergence, commonality and individuality”.* (Smith et al, 2009: 107)

The tables below hope to illustrate the disparity and the interconnections relating to each individuals experience according to the superordinate themes.

### 4.3 Table 2: Subordinate to formulating superordinate themes

#### a. Superordinate theme- Being Heard

Subordinate theme	Kay	Chloe	Kameron	Charlotte	Carl
Voice	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Listened to	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Space to be heard	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Empathy	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

**b. Superordinate theme- Social Justice**

Subordinate theme	Kay	Chloe	Kameron	Charlotte	Carl
Rejection	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Isolation	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Acceptance	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes

**c. Superordinate theme- Space and Privacy**

Subordinate theme	Kay	Chloe	Kameron	Charlotte	Carl
Physical and Sensory Space	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Information Sharing	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Power in Schools	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

**d. Superordinate theme- Connectedness and Intimacy**

Subordinate theme	Kay	Chloe	Kameron	Charlotte	Carl
Transitions	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Coping with losses	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Friendships	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Bullying	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes

**e. Superordinate theme- Aspirations**

Subordinate theme	Kay	Chloe	Kameron	Charlotte	Carl
Achieving	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Independence	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Adaptations by adults	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

The above tables are presented to illustrate the shared experiences and the reoccurrence of themes as presented in the subordinate themes. These were derived from the emergent themes and initial notes made within each individual transcript (See appendix 6 for example). The prevalence of the themes, as above, will be reflected in each section using the transcripts. However there are individual



experiences that show disparity in experiences of education for young people in residential children's homes and these will be accounted and the above tables represents these individual differences.

The next chapter will consider the findings and direct quotes from the transcripts will be presented without the line numbers. The decision not to include line numbers was made as IPA does not have a formulaic process that dictates it necessary to do so. In some parts the direct quotes are punctuated with the dialogue between interviewer (initial M) and the young person so that the flow of the interview conversation is captured to its full effect. I recognise that there are some lengthy direct quotes and these have been included so that what the young people present is not lost. Smith et al, (2009) suggest that there is no right or wrong way in conducting the analysis and instead encourage IPA researchers to be innovative in the way that they do this.

## 5.0 Findings

### 5.11 Being Heard

This superordinate theme was overarching in terms of the young people's experiences. Several repeated references were made within the extracts and the young people revisited their experiences when it came to not being heard, their voice not being heard and the importance of being listened to. This also mattered in terms of those adults that did listen making the difference to the young people's educational experiences and through compassionate empathic responses. In presenting the findings in this section I recognise that there is an absence of Charlotte's voice throughout this superordinate theme. Smith et al, (2009) present that there is no rule for what counts as recurrence and that different participants may manifest the same superordinate theme in different themes. I did note (in reflexive box 3) that my interviews with Charlotte did not lend to a rich data set. Charlotte was reminded of her right to withdrawal and despite this she wanted to be part of this research, it could be argued that she was advocating her right to be heard.

### 5.12 Voice

The extracts had various references where the young people repeatedly stated that there was a lack of their voice present within the education and care experience.

This was exemplified particularly in Carl's interview.

*I wasn't being listened to and I wasn't being truthful because I was in care and my brother was in the same school as me and certain circumstances happened for him. (Carl)*

The above extract is interpreted in terms of Carl explaining that his voice was not heard and that adults had pre-conceived ideas relating to his brother whom staff associated with him. I was mindful that Carl throughout the interview was keen to present his experiences and he wanted to express his hurt, I was moved by how he was able to convey his painful memories.

Equally, Kay made several references to the lack of her voice throughout the process. When I asked Kay what should have happened and how Kay could voice what was going on for her, she responded with:

*They should've asked me how I felt and they never asked .... Never...  
(Kay)*

Kay goes further and gives her view of the reasons as to why 'they' never asked and describes her home life during that time:

*I was looking after my baby brother and sister at that time making sure he was up, making sure he got fed and was...was cared for, I was technically their parent! (Kay)*

The power in Kay's delivery of this cannot be conveyed through written text to the true extent that it was heard. It was in hearing Kay's descriptions and realising the limitations of trying to capture meaning as Kay gave a moving example of the reality of her home life. She went onto describe the expectations of her school life and the stark differences between her home life.

*I was the one that had to bring my little sister and brother up... so I had to cope with that and then I had to cope with exams and do them as well and people asking me to do coursework and that... getting bullied and then making sure that there was food in the house as well, cleaning and doing all the shopping as well. (Kay)*

Kay goes on to state that "*they should have asked how I felt and they never did...*" the simplicity in this basic but yet powerful desire needs no explanation as Kay conveys the meaning of this so eloquently. The notion of Kay not being asked something as simple as 'how do you feel' presents many dilemmas when as practitioners we are constantly devising systems to access young people's voice. Kay and Carl's experiences leave me to reflect in how and what we ask relating to how the young person is feeling, experiencing the decisions made around them?

### **5.13 Being listened to**

The notion of voice or the lack of which is apparent in the extracts as is the subordinate theme of not being listened to. Whilst Kay and Carl repeatedly made reference to their voice continuing to be lacking in the process of their educational

experiences, it was the notion of not being listened to by adults that all of the young people made various references to.

When I asked the young people a question related to what adults should have done in school and what worked for them I elicited the following responses:

*My form teacher she asks me how I am and it helps because I know I've got someone in school that I can talk to. (Chloe)*

Carl also describes that during his most stressful times, adults needed to have listened to him.

*Yes it was talking to people that helped like my teachers and people that I live with.[M]: Was that important for you and can you explain a little about why? [C]; Cus nobody likes not to be listened to and everybody has feelings and they need to let these out and need to talk to somebody and be listened to. (Carl)*

Kay echoes this to some extent when she described her experiences in school and how they differed to her experiences in the pupil referral unit:

*No they never [listened] in school and when I went to the PRU they listened and stuff. (Kay)*

Carl also described that his experiences would have been different if adults took on a listening role and when asked about changes that he would make he responded with:

*I would change the head teacher at my secondary. I would make him more of a nicer person. He needed to listen to me; he was judging me on where I live and on my brother. He wasn't listening and he was taking people's sides. (Carl)*

This was further explored with Carl to see what message he would want conveying to adults about his school experiences and he stated the following:

*I'll basically put it into a nice way just listen to people.... that everyone's got different personalities, treat us fairly and listen to us. (Carl)*

In hearing the young people's accounts and experiences of not being listened to I revisited the notion that if decision making is out of your control then the most powerful vehicle to make your needs known is your voice and the importance of

adults listening to that. The young people's accounts also made me consider what the young people were trying to convey when they felt that they were not heard.

When asked to expand on how Kay's experiences differed in the PRU to school one of the key components of her experience was that she felt listened to:

*They listened to me, helped me out, supported me, not just when I went into care the first time and the next time. (Kay)*

Chloe also gives an example of her experiences when I ask her about her wishes and feelings and if these were accounted for by the adults.

*I feel like they don't cus {sic} I would want them to let me go home... they have all these meetings and say they're listening but they don't. I just want to go home and everything... and we have these meetings and they say they're gonna try{sic} and get me home but I'm still stuck here! Still stuck here now! (Chloe)*

Here Chloe really describes the pain of feeling unheard where adults ask her about her wishes and feelings but there is a mismatch between what is being asked and not hearing the answer that she is looking for. Chloe shouted the last part of her sentence and throughout the interview she became visibly agitated. I asked Chloe at various points if she was ok to continue and despite saying yes she became quickly agitated with her surroundings. I was mindful how extremely difficult it would have been for Chloe as she had recently been placed at the home and understandably it was a sensory and emotionally overwhelming experience.

I did wonder if an adult from school facilitated an emotional space for Chloe; hearing Chloe's pain, talking with Chloe and processing some of the profoundly overwhelming experiences that she was undergoing. It could be that I'm making assumptions here and that this support was available to Chloe which I cannot be certain of, however, my concern here is with Chloe's experiences as she describes them.

## **5.14 Space to be heard**

This particular subordinate theme was evident in the young people's accounts of having physical space available where usually in the context of a 1:1 interaction there would be opportunity to be heard. This interaction usually although not always

was in the context of being punished or sanctioned in that the young person was sent to work with a senior member of school staff in their office or a quiet withdrawal space. This space would then preclude to the young person appreciating that the person spending time with them was more able to understand and process some of their feelings or actions.

*Chloe is enthusiastic about her experience of adults when she needed them in school:*

*Oh my god they were so supportive and they even brought me here... 2 of my teachers brought me here! M: Oh did they and what was that like? C; It was alright! (Chloe)*

Here Chloe was really keen to highlight that it helped having two people that she was already familiar with in school and that they helped her transition from foster care to the home. I also noted that out of all of the young people's experiences it was Chloe that seemed the most settled and had undergone the fewest number of changes of schools. I was keen to explore the impact and the differences that the young people presented.

I asked Carl about the changes of school and at any point did he have the opportunity to think about his situation with an adult in school and he stated;

*There was this lady who I got on with she asked what's happening, why is this happening and I told her about the issues and then nowt {sic} after that and I think everybody gave up on me. (goes quiet). (Carl)*

I asked Kameron a similar question and his response shows what I described earlier in that he would have to check in with an adult and he appreciated having an adult keeping him in mind. I struggled to put aside and bracket my views with reference to the current school systems which in my view in general start with the premise of mistrust. I wondered what if this was the other way around? In that schools started with the premise that they would hold young people experiencing disruption in mind and check in and ensure their well-being and have a relationship based on trust.

I asked Kameron who he turned to during his time of need:

*My support worker Ms H, she was one of the Deputy Head and everyday when I go in I had to go see her and after every lesson I would have to go see her to prove that I hadn't gone home or anything. (Kameron)*

I was uncertain as to how this would feel for Kameron in that he had to prove that he was still physically present and I had to check this out with him.

*It was really good because most of my lessons I missed that much that I didn't know anything and towards end I just went in her office and worked there. (Kameron)*

I asked Kameron how he used the space with Ms H and what made her different and he responded with:

*She got me out of lessons and I couldn't cope in lessons and that helped me because I couldn't cope in lessons where other teachers were like come on Kameron get in the lesson and she knew I just couldn't cope. (Kameron)*

Here Kameron puts forward a fundamental principle in his readiness to access learning and the psychological space needed for his learning. Kameron at this particular time considers the demands within the classroom as overwhelming. Kameron twice states that he was unable to cope and that the other teachers failed to see this, however, Ms H essentially provides a physical and emotional space for Kameron. However, there is a tension here, between providing this space for Kameron whilst trying to also provide him with a school experience. The question in my mind was if this space facilitated his return to the mainstream classroom or did it instead encourage Kameron's need for withdrawal?

## **5.15 Empathy**

The notion of empathy as a subordinate theme was evident in the way that the young people made reference to the components relating to it when describing their situation and the adults varying responses. Empathy is our ability to understand another person's situation from their perspective.

### **Reflexive box 6**

I have to note here that I did have preconceived ideas of the young people experiencing a lack of empathy within a school setting. This stems from experiences relating to working in school settings whereby staff in general are stretched beyond their limits. Specifically, in working with adults who are afforded very little time to manage their day to day activities and then on top of this trying to

get them to elicit empathy towards situations which are usually tense can be difficult. In the EP work it can mean that you are often faced with the staff that are most 'stuck'. I recognise that there is some valuable and insightful work that is done by empathic adults in schools. However, I struggled to shift from the notion of the increasing punitive rhetoric that currently surrounds schools and education. This all had implications with regards to my questioning and interviewing and I had to monitor that I was not asking questions that would be deliberately leading.

I attempted to keep the questioning around this area as open as possible so as not to lead the young people into a particular direction, for example I would ask the young people to describe how adults were in school and what was it like to be in the school and looking back what would they say to the people in school given their experiences? I asked Chloe what her primary school was like.

*Shocking! M: Shocking... in what way? C: The people weren't very nice and the Head didn't care... (Chloe)*

The above extract highlights how Chloe views the Head teacher as not caring which validated her experience of others not being nice also. Chloe referred to a particular year when her experiences were negative due to the head teacher at the time.

Carl also described how he felt a lack of empathy especially from adults in a senior management role in school.

*It would be basically to give more support to people, cus of us being looked after, people seem to judge us as being bad as being naughty as in we're not very good and that our parents obviously didn't want us.... And that's not true. (Carl)*

The lack of empathy and understanding is evident in Carl emphasising the need to be treated fairly and humanely.

*We all have feelings and we are human beings and we should be treated like human beings. It doesn't matter where you live you could be living here. Living on the streets and you should be treated fairly! (Carl)*

I wondered the extent of Carl' experiences of adults in school given this answer. I explored this further and wanted Carl to share his feelings around this.



*basically they treat you differently like this time when someone was allowed to go on the computer but I couldn't. There's also when you go out as a group like you also get dirty looks when you go out from people....(Carl)*

Carl goes on to say that he had an important role out of school with regards to his experiences of being in care and that this was a forum where he could share his experiences.

*Cus I'm a member of the care council and I do a lot of work like changes to help people improve people's lives when they're in care. (Carl)*

Here I found that Carl needed a sense of feeling empowered and that the care council was his way of gaining a sense of empowerment. Carl does go from one topic to the next and this could be because of the overwhelming sense of his experiences.

The notion of feeling overwhelmed and powerless was also one that echoed in Kameron's accounts. However Kameron did not directly imply that adults would need to show empathy, instead he viewed it to be the least of his worries. I specifically ask Kameron how he viewed school especially at a time in his life which felt overwhelming.

*It wasn't important... it was like the least of my worries, I had bigger stuff on my mind so school had to be pushed to the back... (Kameron)*

I tried to explore with Kameron if he had the opportunity to think with others about some of the difficulties that he was encountering at the time.

*Not really I could with people here but I won't... I deal with stuff myself and I block everybody else out. (Kameron)*

However for Kay there was real significance in adults empathising with her situation. Kay described how she would turn to adults and how she encountered a lack of understanding, judgement and no empathy.

*They were like you have to wear your uniform and I said to them that I can't cus {sic} my throat closes and I've got a medical condition and they didn't listen and I was like do you want me to choke to death and they wouldn't listen...they weren't listening and didn't care [chuckles] and I got over it. (Kay)*

I interpreted this as Kay trying to give meaning to her feelings somatically and trying to reach out to the adults. The lack of response or the lack of an appropriate

response from the adults led Kay to give up. Kay went further in her search to reach out and when asked how she should have been made to feel under the circumstances in her life at that time, Kay states:

*They would make you feel.. special... that's what they meant to do anyway.. They didn't do that with me! They didn't like me, it's cus I stuck up for myself... they didn't like me and would accuse me of stuff. (Kay)*

I tried to explore this further with Kay in asking her to describe her situation and her experiences in school.

*Like when they asked for homework and stuff and when I didn't bring it in I'd say that I've had all these things to do, more important things to do, like look after my family! They used to have a go at me for it, and I were like if you were in my shoes what would you do? They wouldn't say anything after that. (Kay)*

Kay realised that the lack of empathy when questioned would lead to silence. This is a powerful question that Kay asks 'if you were in my shoes what would you do?' Kay is explicitly asking adults to show some empathy and to consider her position in the world according to what she has experienced, she powerfully notes that this was met with silence.

## **5.2 Social Justice**

This superordinate theme relates to the experiences that the young people were presenting with reference to the lack of social justice in their lives through the process of rejection, isolation and seeking acceptance. The young people present accounts of decision making by adults that felt out of their control but also the experience of emotional and physical isolation where being punished was a continued theme. There are many examples of how this impacted on their disengagement with education and despite this blame was attributed to the young people's behaviour. Within the superordinate theme another subordinate theme was acceptance and here the young people share the features of acceptance and the importance of having adults accept and understand their situation and the impact of this.

## 5.21 Rejection

A reoccurring and often emotionally charged theme in the young people's experiences was around rejection. This experience was located within schools but also outside school. Adults caring for the young person rejecting them and those in schools rejecting the young person and this was exemplified through experiences of isolation, withdrawal and separation. The young people's insights present their experience in school and the lack of understanding by adults of their experience outside of school. Particularly the experiences put forward by Kay illuminate the reality and the strong feelings around this. Kay presents strong views with regards to how adults treated her in school and her feelings associated with this treatment.

*I've learnt now but when I was younger I didn't but they shouldn't say that your homework should come before your family. Your family should always come first, my family comes first no matter what! {pause} As the saying goes you can choose your family and not your friends... and I don't wanna {sic} chose my family and I love the one I've got. Teachers didn't get that. (Kay)*

Kay misuses the saying that you can *choose your family and not your friends* and this could be just a slip of words but if you were to consider a deeper analysis it could be that this is how Kay subconsciously perceives her situation. Kay illustrates the lack of understanding in terms of her home life as an ongoing issue in school.

*They were bothered that I came to school wearing the right trousers and they were like right you're going home! I was like no I'm not, my brothers and sisters are in this school and do you think I'm leaving them by their selves with you lot! (Kay).*

Kay continues to describe her situation and the responsibilities that she had in comparison to her peers which enhance her sense of rejection. Kay's experiences caused me to reflect on how she not only felt rejection in terms of the adults in her school but also her peers. Kay shares the importance of having her siblings 'fit' in so as to reduce their sense of rejection. Kay took the responsibility of making sure that they were dressed in the correct uniform and had to make sacrifices in terms of her own needs.

*They used to wear the right uniform cus I used to make sure of it. I used to get up so they had time to get changed properly, I got up at 5 and have a shower put some normal clothes on and then made breakfast and that and then get*

*changed in my school uniform so it doesn't get dirty and sometimes I didn't have time to get changed properly so I just used to put my jumper on and they used to have a go at me for it. (Kay)*

Kay describes how difficult her situation outside of school was and the demands and responsibility that she had in comparison to others. Kay highlights her complete loyalty and care for her family and her priority in helping manage her home life which included caring for her siblings. However the adults in school in Kay's experience were rejecting and lacking in understanding. In this situation it can be viewed that for Kay school was secondary to her need to keep her family and siblings together. Kay prioritises her siblings' needs above her own and at the time was a child requiring care herself. The adults in school would have seemingly been the people that should have provided this for Kay however, her experience was one of rejection whereby what she wore and her compliance to school rules was viewed to be more important to the adults. These experience are not limited to Kay as another young person, Carl also was able to reflect on his feelings.

*There was this time when this kid he was saying stuff to me and I said one thing back and he went crying to the head teacher and it was me that got excluded. (Carl)*

*I tried to get out of the door and as he tried to close the door I pulled it and his hand got in the way and... and that's when he expelled me. (Carl)*

Carl detailed his experiences of rejection and exclusion and how this pattern was repeated and the injustice of him being punished repeatedly for the same or similar acts.

*I stayed in isolation for a while, same issues, same incidents, exclusions and it just kept going on. (Carl)*

Carl and the other young people were able to give examples of situations where they were quick to be excluded.

*I got excluded for five days and then I went back and got put into isolation and I got put into a booth all day which was horrible, basically you were put in a small room where everybody can see you in there and you just have to stay there, all day, the next day and the next day after that. (Carl)*

For Carl, my interpretation would be that he was reliving the rejection but also the pain of having to be there for what felt like a never ending punishment.

For both Kay and Carl the rejection came as a result of the adults' lack of understanding of their situation. Adults in school seemed to be quick to reject what was happening in the young people's lives outside and focussed on the here and now. However the initial findings from this section begin to form later themes around creating a climate of unconditional acceptance in schools for individuals that require this due to life circumstances beyond their control.

I asked Chloe to expand on some of the things that she experienced specific to being taught.

*C: My P.E teacher was the worst!*

*M: What did she do?*

*C: Threw me out of class all of the time.*

*M: For?*

*C: Messin {sic} about!*

*M: Did she explain why?*

*C: No she said carry on and you won't be in lesson no more!*

*M: And what did that feel like?*

*C: Shit... she always put me on side lines anyway!*

(Chloe)

The experiences of rejection that the young people shared were not limited to adults in school and one young person, Chloe mentioned this in relationship to her experience of the foster carer before her placement at the children's home.

*I was with (X) and there were 2 of us and she was so mean. She hated me and she liked the other girl. (Chloe)*

This comment I remember and Chloe pausing and what seemed liked her connecting to the rejection. Chloe, particularly out of all of the young people, was adjusting to being in the residential home environment and I wondered how much Chloe viewed her situation in relationship to the foster carers' rejection of her.

## 5.22 Isolation

The young people not only described experiences of physical isolation whereby they were removed and put into an empty room as punishment but also social and emotional isolation. As the young people were experiencing the extreme changes in their family lives and moving from foster to residential placements and for most moving schools. The sense of social and emotional isolation came through and the extract from Kay highlights just how profound her experiences are:

*They should've asked me how I felt and they never asked .... Never... I was looking after my baby brother and sister at that time making sure he was up, making sure he got fed and was...was cared for, I was technically their parent! (Kay)*

Here Kay reflects on the emotional isolation she felt as a result of not being asked how she is and what is happening for her. The experiences that Kay describes are so far removed from those in her peer group and yet she acknowledges that very little allowances were made for her in school.

*I was the one that had to bring my little sister and brother up... so I had to cope with that and then I had to cope with exams and do them as well and people asking me to do coursework and that... getting bullied and then making sure that there was food in the house as well, cleaning and doing all the shopping as well. (Kay)*

For Kay there were far greater priorities than school and the sense of isolation in terms of the expectations from all those around her really comes through. I felt that all of the young people were describing that they were in a physical space i.e. school but within this space the experiences could be isolating. These experiences made me consider the way that the young people viewed school and the impact of school during times of flux.

*Well I didn't go to school that much, I missed 2 years of education. Mostly because one year there was no school that I could go to (coughs) and the second year it was cus it was Year 11 and around October I started to give up on everything and school was the main thing that I gave up on and I would go about once a month... I just gave up on everything. (Kameron)*

The way that both Kay and Kameron describe their feelings can be interpreted as them trying to manage their circumstances alone. This was further apparent when I

asked Kameron if school was important and in some respects I was hoping that it would be, but nearly in all of the responses when I asked this question the young people viewed it as a means to an end:

*See school is my place away from here and that's why I ended up going back and if it weren't my place away from here I wouldn't have gone back... I just had too much to deal with in my life and I just couldn't go and I missed so much that I couldn't go back. (Kameron)*

## 5.23 Acceptance

A key feature within the young people's accounts was that of acceptance. Whilst acknowledging the way that the young people viewed how they were treated in schools they also overwhelmingly shared the ways in which adults made them feel accepted. The acceptance was from both adults in school and peers. This acceptance was nothing extraordinary in fact it could be described as what should have been the majority experience for the young people in school. However the isolated cases of acceptance and kindness featured heavily in what made schools bearable and tolerable for the young people. These instances instilled hope for most of the young people and they were also aware that if one teacher can be like this why can't others?

*Support you basically and give you 1;1 support and make you feel happy and make you get on with your work, some anyway. They can actually talk to young people not like you're a child more like you're an adult. (Carl)*

I wanted to explore Carl raising senior staff as not being supportive and he reported the following:

*Don't like... form my past experience they don't believe me and they're always taking on other people's sides and I just gave up on them. (Carl)*

Here Carl is describing his feelings in relationship to the people that he views to be helping him, to do his work but also to make him feel happy. The way Carl attributes his dislike for senior staff and this being dependent on them 'believing' him. I wondered if Carl had memories related to staff not hearing his pain and him viewing this as 'them' rejecting him which led to his feelings of 'giving up on them' in return.

*There was one that listened to me in my second secondary school and I could work in their room and I just got along with them. (Carl)*

It's interesting that Carl describes acceptance in relation to some staff more so the one senior member of staff that allow him to be in close proximity. I wondered if Carl needed this reassurance from this senior member of staff as if you would need reassurance when in crisis from a reassuring parent/carer. Carl continued to express his message to the head teacher which had overtones of acceptance and the need for recognition of his situation:

*I'll basically put it into a nice way just listen to people.... that everyone's got different personalities, treat us fairly and listen to us. (Carl)*

As part of this theme the young people highlighted accounts of 'being got at' and that their success in an educational environment was dependent on how adults responded to them. For example when I asked Kay what was different as in more positive at College and she described;

*Yeah it is different, it's like if I'm late for lesson they don't have a go at me which they used to before. (Kay)*

Kay also describes a lack of acceptance being a factor in her disengagement with school and education.

*When teachers were being horrible to you and saying you should do this, this and that and you can't tell me what I should and shouldn't do, I need to learn right from wrong. (Kay)*

Here Kay presents a confused account whereby she highlights teachers instilling boundaries which she rejects but she also identifies that that she needs to learn right from wrong.

Chloe presented an example of adults' acceptance through treating her like an adult, which could also be interpreted as her being respected in her own right. She also goes onto describe a simple but meaningful gesture with regards to an adult checking how she is, this is significant to her.

*They treat you like adults! My form teacher, she asks me how I am and it helps because I know I've got someone in school that I can talk to. (Chloe)*



Essentially, Chloe is highlighting an example of adults in school keeping her in mind. This small gesture of checking in can be viewed to be a powerful force that allows Chloe to feel connected, and part of the school where adults care enough for her to know that she can go to them when needed.

### **5.3 Space and Privacy**

The need for space and privacy both in the way information is shared and the physical space that the young people occupy in the residential home was put forward as a key theme by the young people. The main concerns presented by the young people included the way that people would discuss their circumstances and tell others in school without the young people's consent. There was also the lack of awareness of staff in the home about young people and their need for privacy and whilst the young people on the whole recognised the safeguarding measures that adults had to follow it was the disruption that they resented.

#### **5.31 Physical and sensory space**

The notion of physical space and finding this in the children's home was apparent in a non-verbal and indirect way through the interview process. For example, nearly all of the young people were observed to either comment on what is happening outside of the interview room or would pause and sigh if there were undue levels of noise. This was particularly apparent during my interview with Chloe. She would frequently shout at the other young people and tell them to be quiet or say 'ahhh shut up!' when she heard any noise. I would regularly check with Chloe to see that she was ok.

*C: The people weren't very nice and the Head didn't care... ahhh her phone [outside] is doing my head in [shouts]! (Chloe)*

The young people gave examples of the lack of physical space but also how what would seem like routine checks by adults in the home felt intrusive. For example, Kameron described his sleep and how he struggled to switch off and that he would watch television until the early hours of the morning and when he did eventually fall asleep this was disturbed by adults checking in on him.

*It doesn't help that the waking night worker comes in to turn it off and I wake back up to turn it back on cus I can't fall asleep without it being on about an*

*hour later they come to turn it back on again and then I'm awake and it goes on like. Like last night after an hour of me sleeping she came in and I said I'm awake and she came back when I was asleep and I woke up, she came in just to put some papers in my room! (Kameron)*

Kameron reported that he was academically able and he had achieved good results in his GCSE's. However, his attendance due to a lack of sleep and not being able to get up in the mornings significantly affected his education. Kameron describes his routine and it did raise the question whether the adults in the home understood that this is how Kameron was able to sleep and that if he had permission to keep the TV on and not have his sleep disturbed then his attendance at College may have improved.

*They helped me quite a bit and like this year at College I've been struggling and I might not get on to next years course... it's not the work and it's just like going to College and getting there.. it's getting up to go there and if I don't get up and go I won't go. (Kameron)*

Kameron was aware that his College course was at risk due to his attendance and I needed to check if he felt that adults were supporting him with this.

*I get one knock and if I don't get up then that's it...*

*M.. would a second knock help?*

*K: They can have a second, or third and fourth but if I'm not gonna get up then I'm not gonna*

*M: Is that because you're tired?*

*K: Probably I don't get to bed till 3 in the morning and then to be up at 7 err no!*

*(Kameron)*

Kameron had the most to say about this aspect of his living arrangements and I wondered if this was particularly difficult for him due to his poor sleep routines. I tried to delve a little deeper and Kameron was keen to not attribute it to anything other than his like for late night TV programmes.

*M: What do you do till 3 in the morning*

*K: watch TV and stay up for the Ricky Gervais show and just as it comes on I fall asleep and I'm like oh shit I've been waiting for that (laughs).*

(Kameron)

Sleep and the sensory space was an issue for Kameron and he gave another example of how this impacts on him:

*As soon as somebody puts a key in my door I wake up and I'm like somebody's here and I'm really aware. I don't get up, if it's like one of the staff I usually ignore them but at night and I'm not expecting them then I'm like what... If I open my eyes I can't get back to sleep. (Kameron)*

Chloe also comments on the number of young people that she shares her space with and interestingly I noted that she made reference to number of children and young people both within the school and within the home during two separate points within the interview. Chloe notably struggled with the noise and lack of private space.

*...it's always loud, there's about 5 of us. M: What's it like with the other young people? C: Oh my god it's chaotic [listens to noise coming from outside]. I hate loud places! (Chloe)*

With reference to school and numbers Chloe says:

*...it's when it's too crowded! There's like 1988 no 1999 people at school! They need to stop letting more kids in! It's one of the schools that let's all the kids in! (Chloe)*

Chloe also make reference to noise and the loudness that she perceives within the home.

*C: Yeah the loudness and the crazy people here.. there's 2 crazy people here and it's the staff... oh my god they're right hyper...M: In a good way? C: Yeah but I don't like that.. I like calm and when people are quieter. (Chloe)*

I asked Chloe more specifically what helps and makes things easier for her and sensory space and noise both featured in her response:

*C: Quietness, not getting in to trouble and getting on with all my teachers and being around my mates*

*M: Yep and you would leave school*

*C: buses would be on time and it would be quiet at night, people not banging on your door to check on you and I'm usually asleep.*

*M: what do you say?*

*C: Nothing I just let them blab on!*

(Chloe)

I sensed that Chloe needed adults to emotionally regulate themselves even more so when she was feeling overwhelmed with regards to her sensory space. This was evident throughout the interview as Chloe frequently stopped and became agitated with the other young people in the home. Despite this she continued and was so impressive in showing her genuine feelings of frustration and portraying what is a real issue in a residential environment.

### **5.32 Information sharing**

The subordinate theme around information sharing was apparent in two of the young people's accounts of how they viewed adults sharing their story. The balance of people knowing their story and sharing this was sensitive for the young people. For example Chloe was keen for adults not to share information and Carl and Kay felt that if only people had known why school was hard for them and had shared information. The examples within the transcripts try to elicit the polarisation of experience here.

*Like at school some of the teachers... they share all your information all the time.* (Chloe)

I asked Chloe what she views as important and helpful in terms of adults in school and how they make her feel. Chloe is clear in identifying that some adults in school share too much.

*Yeah cus if you tell them something you don't want them to tell everybody!* (Chloe)

In another example Kay puts forward a similar view when I asked her about adults in a supportive role. Kay describes how it is difficult to accept support given her past experiences of adults in a caring role.

*K: I've got pretty bad trust issues cus of what's happened to me in the past. I trust most of them here but I know if it's pretty bad they'll tell my social worker and then I will go off on one!* (Kay)

Kay is aware of the processes that the adults have to follow but wishes that they asked and sought her consent.

*I trusted you and you've told my social worker because that's what they're meant to do but they should've told me and know how to do their job properly.*  
(Kay)

Kay was keen to highlight that she wanted the adults to be upfront and clear about the way that they reported information and for adults to gain her consent. Kay directs this complaint towards adults in the residential home sharing information with the social workers and struggles to see why she is not informed.

*K: Say if I work in a care home and someone trusted me and told me something then I would tell them I'm sorry I know you've told me this but I've got to tell your social worker. They don't do that here!*

*M: Is that all the time or some times?*

*K: Sometimes and all I wanted is for them to say that they would tell my social worker and let me know.*

(Kay)

Kay also identified that it was difficult to share information and turn to adults in school and in the home. Kay described that she viewed herself to 'cope' and to keep things to herself and that this is something that she has always done.

*K: I don't need any of them really, I can cope with stuff, I don't need anybody, I've had to cope since I was little.*

*M: Is there anybody that you can think through stuff with?*

*K: I'd speak to my key worker here but I wouldn't speak to them about proper personal stuff, stuff that's really going on and is personal.*

(Kay)

I pursued this further and tried to ascertain if there was anything that would help her to come forward with information, and her view of adults in a supportive role and Kay was very clear of her mistrust in adults.

*I wouldn't, I would never speak to them about anything.. I wouldn't even talk to my mum or anything, it's just how I am... it's just the way I am. (Kay)*

### 5.33 Power in school

The issue of power and the power imbalance that the young people experienced is evident in their examples of how decisions were made and how included/or not they felt within this process. This was especially apparent in Charlotte's response in how she viewed teachers'.

*C: What people?*

*M: Like teachers?*

*C: Oh no... not them... bossy!*

*M: Any that weren't bossy?*

*C: no.*

*M: Mostly bossy?*

*C: All bossy!*

(Charlotte)

Here Charlotte's answer is brief but to the point as she uses the word 'bossy' which illuminates the power and control that she perceived adults to have in school.

However there were other examples where the young people felt that they had been included to an extent.

*C: Most of it and some teachers and people I live with helped.*

*M; Did you feel heard?*

*C: Some I was and some I wasn't.*

(Carl)

Carl identifies a sense of power balance and I tried to explore this through asking if he would have liked to be more involved in some of the discussions that adults were having about his education.

Kay gives a brief reference to her feelings of adults and power in schools in her response to how adults would make her feel in an ideal school.

*They would make you feel... special... that's what they meant to do anyway. They didn't do that with me! They didn't like me, it's cus I stuck up for myself... they didn't like me and would accuse me of stuff. (Kay)*

Here Kay has taken the control off of the adults and she uses the example of 'sticking up' for herself as a way of re gaining this control which would present as defiance and possible lead to some of the negative consequences in school.

In the responses to the question which asked what do adults need to more of, less of in schools, most of the answers highlighted qualities of adults which included 'being heard', young people in care having 'respect' and being treated 'like humans'.

*It would be basically to give more support to people, cus of us being looked after, people seem to judge us as being bad as being naughty as in we're not very good and that our parents obviously didn't want us.... And that's not true we all have feelings and we are human beings and we should be treated like human beings. (Carl)*

With regards to adults having power and control there seemed to be a dichotomy involving the young people needing adults to make adaptations whilst not treating the young people differently.

*C: It doesn't matter where you live you could be living here. Living on the streets and you should be treated fairly!*

*M: Thank you and you mentioned that people judge you, what makes you feel this way?*

*C; basically they treat you differently...*

(Carl)

## **5.4 Connectedness and Intimacy**

This superordinate theme presents the complexity of the young people's situation with reference to their experiences of relationships. This is further located in the young people's reports of how they managed adults expectations, friendships and trust in adults. I consider the complexity of these relationships in conjunction with the young people's feelings of loss and rejection through their experiences of being bullied.

### **5.41 Transitions**

In hearing the young people's accounts they were describing transitions and changes at a rapid rate which impacted on their sense of belonging. The changes in

schools and education were secondary to the ones in their care but equally the response by schools was important when trying to manage and contain the young people.

*C: I've been to loads and I can't remember them all you know!*

*M: How many schools is that?*

*C: About 20!*

*M: Why did you have to go to different schools, tell me a bit more about what happened?*

*C: I were like moving a lot init {sic}!*

*M: is there anything you can remember about them schools?*

*C: I can't remember... [shrugs shoulders]*

(Charlotte)

Here Charlotte is showing annoyance at the question which interestingly is one of the few questions that she did answer. Charlotte reports that she has been to around '20 schools' which even if this wasn't the case, it is how she perceived these moves. Charlotte understandably may have chosen to block and not recall the details of these moves and the questions may have evoked some difficult feelings. I was able to acknowledge this with Charlotte and her key worker (see reflexive box 3).

The young people reported experiences of transitions related to their experiences of being excluded and 4 of the 5 young people had experienced fixed terms and permanent exclusion from their schools. I asked Carl what his feelings were around his exclusions.

*I was angry and then I got given the opportunity to go to another school and this was my other secondary. I loved it at first and it was good with good atmosphere with good staff but then I started to get into incidents and got excluded a couple of times and then I didn't go into lessons or do my exams. I was on the corridors having arguments with senior members of staff and then they kicked me out and moved me into the inclusion unit. (Carl)*

Here Carl described a pattern where he would initially settle and then when he found it difficult this would lead to incidents which led to his exclusions. The points raised by Carl made me consider how difficult it must be to continually experience changes



at this level. Additionally for the young people to leave one setting and be expected to rapidly adjust to another set of educational expectations.

Kameron shared his experiences and interestingly he laughed when I asked him about schools that he attended... as if to say where do I start?

*Oh god, (laughs), X Academy, then to an inclusion unit, I can't remember name of it, the school in Y, can't remember the name of that and then I went to another inclusion unit and then I went to Z and then after that I went to an academy. (Kameron)*

Here Kameron reports 6 school moves that he is able to recall and these are not including his Colleges and alternative providers and home schooling. Again a feature in the response is poor recall which made me wonder the extent and frequency of the moves.

*Well I didn't go to school that much I missed two years of education? Mostly because one year there was no school that I could go to (coughs) and the second year it was cus it was Year 11 and around October I started to give up on everything... (Kameron)*

Kameron is describing a time in his mind where there was no school that he could go to. The power of this statement made me consider what message was relayed to Kameron during this time... that there was no school that would 'take' Kameron or manage his level of need. Inevitably this impacted on his feelings of hopelessness:

*School was the main thing that I gave up on and I would go about once a month... I just gave up on everything. (Kameron)*

In sharing their experiences of transitions the young people also described a range of educational experiences including inclusion units, alternative providers and home schooling.

*Well when I first moved to X I wasn't in a school it was like a school but that was 2 years ago. And before that I was living in a village in Y school that was really strict. (Kay)*

I especially struggled in trying to elicit any answers from Charlotte and the extract below demonstrates that.

*M: So shall we start with me asking what school means to you Charlotte?*

*C: Nowt {sic}...*

*M: It means nowt {sic}, why?*

*C: Cus {sic} it don't.*

(Charlotte)

Charlotte in some ways says very little but expresses a very powerful message in that school did not mean anything to her.

The experiences described by the young people relating to transitions demonstrated; the emotional pain, rejection, ambivalence and an underlying expectation that school moves were part of the course.

## **5.42 Coping with Losses**

In presenting the subordinate theme of loss I am mindful that my findings will only reflect what the young people shared with me. I am also aware that there will be deep rooted losses for each and every one of them and the memories shared with me will only be the tip of these experiences. I would also interpret this from most of the young people at some point saying 'I can't remember', when asked to expand on some of their answers relating to their past. This may be in keeping with their peers as most young people will likely to struggle to remember details of schools and events, but I did wonder the impact of loss on what the young people were able to recall. This is reflected more so in Charlotte's interview and despite wanting to be involved in the research process, the transcript was marked with struggling to share and wanting to be included.

*M: So I just need a tiny bit more about things that you want to share?*

*C: I can't remember.*

*M: Anything that you can remember?*

*C: It were years ago and I can't remember.*

(Charlotte)

Kay was able to talk about her losses and they were rooted in her experiences of loss within her family.

*K: Yeah every 2 weeks for 2 hours and it's not enough though. When they got put into foster care and they said they would make more contact and they haven't... actually last year on my birthday I didn't see them.*

*M: You would like more contact?*

*K: Course I would especially with them. I can go to my mums whenever.*

*(Kay)*

Kay in the above extract describes her frustration with the lack of contact with her family members and the losses associated with contact arrangements in the care system. Kay goes on to report her losses in more detail including the loss of her twin brother.

*I've told her that in my heart it still hurts and yeah my brother [twin], dad and then my granddad and yeah (pauses) I've lost loads. (Kay)*

The grief that Kay has experienced is insurmountable and yet she is able to articulate it and express her hurt. Kay goes on to describe the physical loss of members of her family:

*My dad's not alive, he died 7 years ago and yeah that was just after I started smoking and drinking he died. Yeah I was young and I had to deal with a lot and I can say that when my family die or go in hospital, I cope, I mean I cope with it pretty well. Like my granddad he died about 2 months ago and I was really close to him and yeah on Sunday it'll be 3 months since he died. He was like my dad after my dad died and my mum still gets upset and she's not been herself since. (Kay)*

In analysing Kay's transcript the theme of loss was a predominant feature and this included loss of family members but also the loss of her role as a caregiver to her siblings.

*Even when I saw them at contact and I used to be like wanting to look after them and contact worker was like no it's our job we get paid for it and I was like well I didn't get paid for it did I? I didn't want to get paid for it I enjoyed it and I enjoyed looking after them. (Kay)*

Kay here describes her identity as carer and shares her past role in caring for her siblings and when she shares its 'not my job any more' this is Kay coming to terms with the loss of siblings but also the loss of this role and the loss of her past with her siblings.

*Yeah, I just wanted to be with (sister x) and (brother x) and I couldn't be with them anymore and they wanted to be with me. I have to live with the fact that I*

*would never live with them again. They can live with me and not with my mum just with me and when I get my own flat they can come and live with me there... (Kay)*

The above extract demonstrates Kay coming to terms with the decisions about being separated from her siblings but is hopeful that they will be together again. Kay also recognises that they would not be together as a family unit in saying that her siblings will live with her and not with their mum.

I was keen to explore if the young people were able to share their experiences and feelings associated with loss. There was a common theme of mistrust in sharing experiences of loss which was reflected in the answers that were provided by Kameron, Carl and Kay. I have referred to the specific extracts related to coping alone and the difficulty that the young people encountered in sharing these feelings with others.

Kameron:

*M: Looking back did you have the chance to think with somebody else about what was hard.*

*K: Not really I could with people here but I won't... I deal with stuff myself and I block everybody else out.*

*M: Do you feel that over time that this has changed?*

*K: I don't know but I know it's not a good thing and that I block everybody out and give up on things.*

*M: At least you're thinking about it and recognise this.*

*K: Yeah but when I'm doing it I know I'm doing it and I can't stop myself and it's like second nature now... (Kameron)*

Carl:

*M: Did you feel understood?*

*C: No I don't think so as I'm one of these people that keep it in.*

*M: Would you have liked this?*

*C: Yes I would have and it wouldn't bother me and I wouldn't blurt it out to anyone. (Carl)*

Kay:

*I've got pretty bad trust issues cus of what's happened to me in the past. I trust most of them here but I know if it's pretty bad they'll tell my social worker and then I will go off on one...* (Kay)

I would interpret the above extracts as demonstrating the extent of the young people's self-reliance, viewing adults in a cautious way and avoiding disclosing any feelings of loss due to past experiences. Kay attempts to instil trust in the adults around her, but is fully aware of the processes and her adverse response to those processes in the past.

### **5.43 Friendships**

The notion of friendships was explored with the young people and I wanted to understand how the young people perceived friendships. More specifically what friendships meant and if they were school based friendships. Also to gain insights into how the young people ascribed meaning to their friendships.

Nearly all of the young people apart from one were able to give a response to their experience of friendships. Carl described a time in his early schooling where he had positive memories of being with friends and he reflected that this time differed to his time in secondary.

*It was different in Juniors. I loved my Juniors and Infants, I loved socialising with my friends.* (Carl)

I asked Carl what changed from Junior school to Secondary and he describes it below.

*I didn't like exams and I was moving schools and my friends didn't do well in exams and some of my friends who didn't go to exams and now they've not got a job.* (Carl)

Here I interpret this as Carl trying to cope with the demands of secondary school and compare his situation to his friends. I sensed that Carl was also trying to reflect that he did comparatively well in comparison to his friends. The way Carl views this situation could be interpreted as him having a sense of control and a feeling of empowerment with his situation, where this may have been lacking in other areas of his life compared to his peers.

I was interested to know how Carl viewed friendships and his answer demonstrated that friendships were not a priority for him in school. Instead he viewed adults to have more importance. I considered Carl's response to mean that he preferred older friendships.

*I'm not into young person friendships and I'm more tend to hang around with adults and older people...I was never my own peer group person and I liked people older than me. (Carl)*

In opposition to Carl's response to friendships, Chloe viewed friends to be a key part of her schooling. When asked what was important for Chloe in school her immediate response was her friends.

*I've got a little group of friends and we all have a laff {sic} and we all talk.*

*M: So in your friendship group do you feel that your experiences are different to theirs?*

*C: Yeah I do feel like I'm different because none of them are in care.*

*(Chloe)*

Chloe is aware of the importance of her friendships and she is also aware of the differences of her experiences including her care experiences. I asked what was important in relationship to her friendships.

*C: it's like they make me feel important and I make them feel important and that's what we do for each other.*

*M: Are they more important than adults?*

*C: Pauses... Yeah sort of but no... it's like you can fall out with friends and all...adults are always there for you.*

*(Chloe)*

The above extract can be interpreted as Chloe having a clear sense of how she views her friends and she ascribes it to the way they make her feel and the way she makes them feel. Chloe uses the word 'important' and this can be viewed as powerful when you take account of the way that the young people described their experiences in care. To be made to feel and to make others feel 'important' when adults in your life, for whatever reason, are unable to do so. The meaning of friendship and the importance is recognised by Chloe whilst acknowledging that friendships are also susceptible to fall outs.

The way that Chloe was able to separate the support that she received from her friendships and adults was impressive. Chloe had clear boundaries with regards to the separate roles that these relationships fulfilled. I went on to ask Chloe if she needed the adults to support her friendships and she responded with:

*No not really. I'm pretty good at mending my friendships cus I'm the one that falls out with them but then I'm the one that still mends it! (Chloe)*

There is a maturity to Chloe's response that made me consider, is this how she viewed most situations in life where she ascribes responsibility to herself rather than adults.

In terms of Kameron and his experiences of friends it's interesting to note that he had a large group at College and over time this group became smaller due to his peers 'dropping out'. Again this could be the majority experience in terms of College courses and dropout rates but I did wonder about the implications with regards to isolation.

*I've got mates in college and I meet up with them to play pool but there were 30 of us and half have dropped out and all my mates have left so they all dropped out like 3 months ago. (Kameron)*

I asked Kameron if things felt different and he was able to expand and share his experience of his best friend also leaving College.

*K: Yes it is and my best mate dropped out 2 weeks ago and I've not seen her since?*

*M: Oh Ok has that affected you in any way?*

*K: Not really she got me out of lessons... she was the one that said come on Kameron let's get out of lessons and she was always telling me to wag it (Laughs).*

*(Kameron)*

Here Kameron and his friend enjoy spending time out of lessons and Kameron is aware that he was happy to be misled by his friend. I found it interesting that Kameron shared that this 'best mate' had left and that he had not seen her since but seemed to show no outward emotion about this. I wondered if Kameron's transient experiences had impacted on his response to his 'best mate'. I pressed this further in asking how Kameron viewed friendships.

*K: Yeah I'm still in touch with friends from when I was little, I'm still in touch with my oldest mate who I've known since I was 3 years old and see him every Sunday. I've also found friends from X where I used to live on Facebook. (Kameron)*

I was again interested in Kameron sharing the importance of his past friendships rather than his current ones. It was poignant to note that Kameron had managed to keep hold of his longest friendship and continued to see him. He also used a social networking site to reconnect to friends from his past.

The theme of fragmented friendships was also evident in Kay's transcript. Kay appeared saddened when I asked her about friends.

*I don't have any friends not really... say I had loads of friends a couple of months ago and they were back stabbing me and taking advantage and stuff and I realised that... and you know town I used to hang out there and I've stopped it completely and none of them messaged me or asking me how I am none of em {sic} at all, none of em cared about me and they were just using me and stuff. (Kay)*

Kay described the complexity of trust and friendship in the above extract. I also interpreted her feelings of rejection and not being cared for and how hard this would have been for Kay. I understand that this experience of friendship fall outs is not unique to young people in care but I did wonder about the impact and space to process yet another loss. I tried to explore this further with Kay and asked about friendships in College.

*They're alright they weren't part of the gang that I was in and I don't talk to them cus I can't see any point of it. I don't need any of them really, I can cope with stuff, I don't need anybody, I've had to cope since I was little. (Kay)*

Here Kay illustrates her utter self-reliance and not needing anybody and at this point I sensed that Kay was angry with the fall out. I also found it interesting that later on in the interview Kay gave a polarised view to the one above.

*M: Yeah and what about friends?*

*K: Yeah I've got some really good friends and yeah if I see one of them and they can tell I'm upset they will ask and I'll say to em {sic} I don't wanna {sic} talk about it and they'll say well I'm here for you. I can trust some of them... not all of them.*

*(Kay)*



Kay identifies that she has some really good friends and that they can read her emotional state but reiterates that she wouldn't want to share her upset with them again in keeping with her need to cope. She also makes reference to trust and not being able to trust all of her friends. Kay goes onto describe a close friendship and the complex interplay relating to this friendship.

*There's one person that I've known a year and a half, Josh, and I can trust him and he can trust me. Like Josh told me and nobody else that he's pretty ill, nobody else knows about this and I know what he's got and I'm not gonna say it cus obviously he's told me not to tell no one but people keep asking me 'what's wrong with Josh, has he told you what's wrong with him?' All I'm saying is that he's ill and that's all I'm saying. I won't tell them more stuff. If anyone asks then all they're getting out of me is that he's ill. He knows that I'm there for him, he knows that. (Kay)*

I wondered if Kay had a protective role here where Josh needed to be cared for and Kay felt able to do this. I also considered Kay's positioning in this friendship as 'carer' to Josh and the person that was privy to information about his life that she could not share with others, in some ways mirroring her situation in care.

I asked Kay about the friendship:

*He comes to me and cuddles me and (became animated) and shouts I've missed you Kay and I say I missed you too. We don't see each other a lot. (Kay)*

In the above extract, Kay shows how important it is for her to be held in mind and recognises the importance of intimacy relating to friendships. I probed further to gain some sense of how Kay viewed this friendship.

*K: He's been through similar stuff and yeah he's more mature and I'm more mature than most 16 year olds...Josh helped me with a lot.*

*M: Do you find he understands because you've got similar experiences?*

*K: Yeah cus he's in care as well but he doesn't know why I'm in care and we don't talk about it and I don't know why he's in care and that's ok.*

*(Kay)*

Kay identifies that her friendship is defined by the similarity in their experiences and I also sensed the importance of feeling cared for by her friend. The theme of not sharing and not having to open up continued into this close friendship and I did wonder if this was a protective factor. Specifically the young people putting up a

protective wall (arising out of past experiences) so as to avoid feeling exposed whether this was related to friendships but also to a more widespread connectedness to others.

## 5.44 Bullying

The subordinate theme relating to bullying was evident in the responses presented by the young people and they were associated with the negative experiences of school. Specifically the young people in their descriptions were highlighting that it was yet another rejection amongst the many that they had already experienced.

I asked Charlotte about her experience of school and she very quickly asserted:

*C: it was shit!*

*M: Why was it shit about it, can you tell me a bit more? Silence*

*M: What did they do or didn't do that made it like that?*

*C: {pause} They didn't stop my bullying did they! I used to have stuff chucked at me so I stopped going!*

(Charlotte)

Charlotte's account served to illustrate that bullying was a persistent issue that led to her withdrawal and eventual disengagement from education. I was unable to get Charlotte to expand and her key worker was in the room and did interject to say that this and other factors that led to Charlotte accessing an alternative package relating to her education.

Carl does not directly say that he was bullied but implies it through his description of behaviours of another pupil towards him:

*Basically as I said previously I was talking to that boy who I didn't get along and it got worse and he started to be abusive he attacked me first and then I responded but then it was only me that got excluded which was unfair. It felt like I was telling the truth and that I was lying and that's one thing I can't stand, being called a liar... I don't like it. (Carl)*

In the above extract Carl uses the words 'abusive' and 'attacked' instead of bully and this made me reflect on the intensity of the negative emotions associated with this and the injustice that Carl feels here. This and the other experiences presented by

the young people made me wonder how safe the school space was for them. The experiences relating to bullying are upsetting at best and harrowing at their extreme for all young people and the intensity of this rejection for the young people here felt tenfold.

*when I was at X [school] I used to get bullied a lot cus my sister had learning difficulties and they used to bully me because of it and like it was my fault that this that and the other cus I looked after them... (Kay)*

The social isolation and blame projected towards Kay by her peers demonstrates the above point. This account put forward by Kay demonstrates that her peers would not stop at bullying just Kay, but also blaming her for her home life. Kay had to contend with standing up to the bullies on her sibling's behalf but also be subjected to the blame relating to this.

*I used to get blamed and in trouble for it and they were like your sister's got learning difficulties cus of you and I was like it's not may fault... it's no one's fault... I just had to stand up to them cus I didn't like it. (Kay)*

I was curious to see if the young people were supported by adults in this situation and the responses highlighted that as with other situations, the young people would not share their experiences of being bullied or hurt with them.

*K; I didn't tell them cus they wouldn't listen and told them once they didn't do ought {sic} about it?*

*M: Is that throughout school?*

*K: Yeah that was throughout school and I got bullied all time and when I stood up for myself... like there was this one girl in the year above me and she bullied me and was horrible to me and slapped me and when I slapped her back she was like why you doing that and I said you slap me and you expect me not to slap you back...*

*(Kay)*

The above extract highlights how Kay was trying to regain control and instead of turning to an adult she was trying to solve the problem through 'standing up' to the bullies for herself. I imagined that this would have caused additional problems for Kay rather than solved them for her. The reality of Kay's situation is not isolated to her experiences and the issue of young people having to fight back (as much as the adults disapprove and sanction these behaviours) is altogether a very real option to the young people. The notion of justice and the young people 'taking things into their

own hands' to counteract the bullying led me to believe that the young people did not trust that the adults would get it right by them. This must have been a frequent experience for the young people to look to alternative harmful solutions to solving their problems.

I asked Kay if she would turn to an adult in helping her resolve disputes relating to her siblings and she stated:

*No I wouldn't. Say they get picked on by somebody at school and then I'd talk to the kid and ask them why are you picking on them, how do you think that's right to bully people and what's your problem? If they're like what's it to you, I'd say I can cus I'm their sister... I've always done it and there was this kid J and I asked him why he was picking on my brother and I asked how would he like it if I did it back, he said he wouldn't like it and he stopped it after that and it didn't happen again. (Kay)*

The above highlights that Kay addressed the issue head on and in this situation the bullying stopped, which I suspect would lead to Kay continuing to face bullies in this way. In the responses related to bullying there seems to be a common theme of not turning to adults and managing the conflict with peers through addressing it head on and regaining control as much as possible; whether that's through the withdrawal that Charlotte presents, responding and then being excluded as Carl shares or taking it into her own hands as Kay describes.

## **5.5 Aspirations**

The superordinate theme is one that attempts to capture the young people's hopes and aspirations. This was particularly pertinent as the young people shared their accomplishments and were proud of the things that they had achieved. I noted that Carl, Chloe and Kay and to some extent Kameron started answering their questions by making links with education and access to employment. The young people were quick to connect achievement with independence. Additionally, they recognised the importance of adults making adaptations so that they were able to fulfil their potential.

## 5.51 Achieving

The subordinate theme relating to achieving is how the young people viewed education. In that when I asked the question relating to the importance of education most of the young people saw it as their route to independence. This could be said to be the case for most young people if asked this question, however, there was a sense of hope that the young people presented which could be interpreted as education freeing the young people from their constraining pasts. More specifically the opportunities that achieving success in education would allow.

*Basically that I get all the qualifications that I need to get a job... (Carl)*

Here Carl is keen to communicate that what matters is the qualifications and without these he would be unable to access employment, a job. Carl was accessing an apprenticeship and was very proud of his current work situation. Carl expressed at the end of the interview that he found work suited his needs better and that school was a means to an end in achieving the qualifications to get work.

I asked Chloe if school was important and again her immediate response was that it was as it would allow her to gain access to employment that she wanted.

*C: Yeah it is at it helps me in getting a job that I want.*

*M: Yeah what job is that?*

*C: I want to be chef in the army.*

*M: Oh wow, do you!*

*C: Yeah and I'm at College as well.*

*M: What are you doing there?*

*C: I'm doing Catering.*

*M: Is that enjoyable?*

*C: Yeah it's fun!*

(Chloe)

Chloe had a very clear focus and in the above extract we can see how she is excited by her career direction. She highlights that her choice of subject is fun and this did make me wonder the importance of subject choice and motivation. More specifically

in considering the challenges that the young people faced and how adults in school were could help ensure that the choices available enthused and engaged the young people so that they did achieve and fulfil their potential.

Kay viewed her achievements as a way of being a positive role model for her siblings:

*Yeah I'm not doing it just for me I'm doing it for my brother and sister cus I'm going to College and they're not doing right well at school but I want them to be like me, if I can go to College they can. (Kay)*

Here it can be interpreted that Kay does not want her younger sibling's early schooling experience to be similar to hers and has aspirations for them. Kay is aware of the difference relating to her current situation and her siblings and wants them to hold onto how she has achieved despite the odds.

Kameron stated his achievements towards the end in his appraisal of my interview, he reported that he considered the interview to have gone well, especially as he knew how difficult it was interviewing people.

*I think you've done really well with the questions. I know how nerve wracking it is asking questions I've interviewed people for stuff to do with social work. ... Yeah I do it all of the time... I've interviewed Chief exec and about 200 social workers! (Kameron)*

In the above extract Kameron's sense of pride and his sense of achievement is evident as he tries to reach out to align our experiences of interviewing. I sensed that Kameron was showcasing his skills and I wanted to explore this further.

*K: I just know people... I'm part of the care council and I'm involved with all sorts, like I do loads for the achievement awards and I help out in that and I'm also in a band and I play with them.*

*M: I bet that keeps you busy... do you find it motivating and are you keeping on with that?*

*K: Yeah and I'm gonna keep at it until I'm 18 and after then the care council. (Kameron)*

These opportunities and examples of Kameron's engagement were really illuminating, as earlier in his experiences relating to school there was little hope and suddenly in the post 16 world there seemed to be more opportunities and autonomy. This led me to question the rigidity and stifling nature of compulsory schooling more

so if there is adversity and inequality in your early life experiences. Some of the young people were demonstrating an awareness of education and the opportunities that it brings and were hopeful that they would achieve once they were outside of the constraints of mainstream secondary schooling.

## 5.52 Independence

The young people were strident in their need to have independence, away from the residential setting and viewed education as a way of achieving this. Some of the young people shared their aspirations, specifically Kay when asked what she was doing to move towards her independence she identified the following;

*I want to work in a care home and help people because I've been in care and I know exactly, well not exactly but I know. I know how it makes people feel and if you work in a care home you can help them out even more. (Kay)*

Here Kay communicates her aspiration to continue working in the field of care and she references in her account that she knows how it feels. I regret not pressing her some more in this area and I wish that I had explored this further. Specifically, how would Kay's care for the people in the care home look (similar/different) to the care that she received?

Most of the young people reported the need to have some sense of being treated like adults and have independence away from the prying eyes of adults either in the home or educational setting.

*C: Yeah I'm more independent and I love that... they treat you like adults!*  
(Chloe)

Here Chloe is reflecting on the difference between Primary and Secondary school and the importance of independence is evident in Chloe's response as she is able to reflect the joy of being treated like adults. I considered that to be treated like an adult would have significant meaning for Chloe and the other young people. It would mean the opportunity to have choices, control and freedom around decision making. This would be beyond the rigid and measured systemic responses that the young people were likely to be experiencing. To be an 'adult' would allow the young people to seek the intimacy that was lacking.

*See school is my place away from here and that's why I ended up going back and if it weren't my place away from here I wouldn't have gone back... I just had too much to deal with in my life and I just couldn't go and I missed so much that I couldn't go back. (Kameron)*

Kameron shows insight in his knowledge that school was his place away from the home and the dichotomy of having little choice between a place he did not want to be in (home) and a place he did not want to go to (school). Kameron's ability to reflect and share that he had so much to 'deal with' in his life and it could be interpreted that this is likely more than most his age.

*M: Speaking about school and College is it an important place?*

*K: Yeah it is important me cus it's gonna help with my future and my future's very important to me...*

(Kay)

The importance of the future is highlighted by Kay and she refers to the significance of education in helping shape that future.

### **5.53 Adaptations made by adults**

The following subordinate theme considers the importance of adults when supporting the young people and the adaptations that enabled the young people to have successes. Moreover, the experiences and perceptions of the young people and what they were able to identify with reference to what made a difference to their educational experience, relating to the adults in school.

The question posed in various guises to the young people related to; (i) what would they want adults in school to do more of, (ii) what would they want in a kitbag of things that helped and (iii) what would be their message to adults in their schools?

Of the few questions that I was able to ask Charlotte the one that she did respond to was related to the ideal school and her response to some extent could be what most young people would view the ideal school to be:

*C: It would be in my bedroom... sniggers.*

*M: Ok let's go with that, what lessons would be there?*

*C: Sleeping, more sleeping and TV!*



*M: What about when you got bored?*

*C: X box!*

(Charlotte)

Charlotte's response could also be interpreted as her bedroom in the home as her safe space and that sleep is her escape.

Carl also proposed a number of ways that adults could work with young people including respecting young people and providing support.

*Support you basically and give you 1:1 support and make you feel happy and make you get on with your work, some anyway. They can actually talk to young people not like you're a child more like you're an adult. (Carl)*

Carl put forward the need for 1:1 support and I wondered if this was the key relationship that he was inferring to and used the wording 1:1, as this is what schools refer to. Carl refers to this again:

*It was the school's inclusion unit and things were good there and I really enjoyed it. I got 1:1 support and I started to go to my exams and did my work and qualified (laughs). (Carl)*

Here Carl implies that his success was related to the support that he received at the inclusion unit. A similar question was asked of the other young people and when I asked Chloe about the skills that people need in schools for her to feel supported, she identified a number of things:

*C: Useful information, politeness, respectfulness, is that even a word? Respectfulness (Laughs), kindness... how many things are in the bag?*

*M: No limits, it's whatever's important to you?*

*C: friendly, relaxed, good listener... I've run out of ideas.*

(Chloe)

The above skills could be considered important to all young people when asked about adults in school, however, the notion of respect and its importance is vital here. This is important because of how the young people have experienced inequality and adversity as a result of adult decision making. Chloe makes reference to useful information and this made me wonder if she was referring to the information that would have been helpful to her. Specifically adults being accessible and having a nurturing approach.

The notion of respect, fairness and equality is also evident in Carl's answer when asked what he would want to say to adults in schools relating to his education.

*give more support to people, cus [sic] of us being looked after, people seem to judge us as being bad as being naughty as in we're not very good and that our parents obviously didn't want us.... And that's not true we all have feelings*  
(Carl)

Here Carl is alluding to judgements made by others about young people that are looked after. He shares the injustice and prejudices that exist and tries to humanise his experiences and wants others to empathise. Carl could be viewed to have internalised a sense of blame and is seeking reassurance. He infers to social justice and has a strong sense of fairness and advocates for equality.

I was interested in hearing how the young people viewed the adaptations made by adults and what helped them to have a sense of belonging within an educational context.

*K: Tutors, friends, education... Make sure you're alright and if you're not... help you find out what it is and if you don't wanna {sic} tell them then they would be like alright then but I'm still here... stuff like that. They would support you really and yeah listen to you and help you out if something was wrong.*

*M: How would they make you feel?*

*K: They would make you feel... special... that's what they meant to do anyway.*

(Kay)

The above message was also echoed in the other young people's responses. Kay, as did Carl, put forward the importance of adults listening and not making judgements. The feeling that Kay describes are attributed to adults offering unconditional support. I viewed this as the young people seeking unconditional positive regard and emotional containment within an educational context. I also had the opportunity to ask Chloe what doesn't help in school.

*C: Disrespectful, loud, nasty, horrible, not a good listener, interruptive or like them trying to say they are better than you, unfair.*

*M: Anything else?*

*C: Can't remember.*

*M: Ok how would you not want them to make you feel?*

*C: Scared, intimidated err uncomfortable err unreliable.*

(Chloe)

Here Chloe is very clear in describing the opposite of what the young people identified as positive traits relating to adults. The theme of injustice and disrespect featured in her response. As did the importance of being reliable which was clearly Chloe's highlighting the importance of confidentiality and adults' not sharing information with everybody in the context of school.

The young people also had clear views relating to support offered in schools and the notion of support featured in most of their responses relating to this theme.

*It's important to know that you have people that support ya {sic} and if you don't have someone that will support you then you need to find someone that will and he has to be somebody, no especially somebody that you can trust. Because I only trusted certain people and you have to have people that you trust. (Kay)*

Kay makes the case here that trust is an essential component within the support system. My interpretation of this is Kay's need to feel safe and secure within the context of school and that this is essential for her to ensure trust in key relationships with adults in school. Kay's experiences as described earlier both in the home and school setting are likely to have shaped her response to view others with caution. It would be for adults then to ensure they enable Kay to have a sense of trust, dependence and hope when it comes to adults in a helping role.

In asking the young people what would their message to schools and education providers be with reference to what the young people have experienced. The responses highlighted the need for school settings to be flexible, enjoyable and welcoming.

*Right change schools, change the way you teach, you need to learn to make learning fun and kids and kids don't want to sit in a room for an hour getting talked to by a teacher that's the last thing they want to do. They need to have more activities cus [sic] people would learn better. (Kameron)*

This is evident in both Kay and Kameron's response as they both refer to adults being flexible to reflect the needs of the young people. Moreover, the young people identified the need for adults to 'get it right', at a time in the young people's lives when they need it the most.

*Start listening to everyone and if they've got a problem and they're upset listen to them, you don't leave them! Talk to them, don't shout neither... you don't get anywhere if you shout and you don't get anywhere if you threaten them, you don't get anywhere! I know that for a fact and listen and keep listening and if you can't help them then ask who will help? You ask them and don't just go and tell them off. Yeah they need to treat you as people and not like poo you find on the end of your shoe (chuckles)! (Kay)*

Here Kay has a powerful message and that relates to voice, to hear the young people's story and stay by their side. Kay is describing adults in schools to be containing and offer help without taking over and imposing. Again similar to Carl's response, Kay highlights the need for dignity and respect which makes you wonder how and what the young people have experienced in their education.

## 6.0 Discussion and Implications for Practice

In this chapter the results will be discussed in relation to the research questions.

The research set out to explore the questions below:

- What are the educational experiences of young people looked after in children's residential homes?
- What accounts of school based relationships do the young people describe?
- How can EPs support better outcomes for young people looked after in residential care?

The superordinate themes elicited from the young people's interviews provided insights into the way that the young people viewed education and shared their experiences of the relevance, or not, of education in their lives. In terms of the factors that promote good educational outcomes I will consider the findings from the interviews and discuss in this chapter with specific reference to research in this area. Alongside this, consideration will be given to the unmet needs of the group as reported by the young people. The analysis will also consider young people's accounts of friendships at school. Finally, how EPs can be best placed to support and enhance better outcomes for young people looked after in residential care.

This chapter will also consider the research presented in the literature review with specific reference to the five superordinate themes elicited from the interviews:

- Being Heard
- Social Justice
- Space and Privacy
- Connectedness and Intimacy
- Aspirations

The above themes were derived from idiographic accounts of the lived educational experiences of young people looked after in residential care. Therefore interpretation is specific to this study and the findings should be interpreted carefully as the views collated within this study would not be representative of all young people looked after in residential care.

## 6.1 Overarching Educational Experiences- Where is my Voice?

The present study found that the young people in this research felt that their voice was not heard and their feelings were unaccounted for. The findings from this research are reflected in studies that highlight the way that the young people repeatedly say that the education system discounts their voice, actual experiences and feelings. This is despite the existence of legal frameworks and statutes that advocate the need to include the voices, wishes and feelings relating to the young people's experiences of services including:

- United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) - Article 12 specifies the rights of the child to express an opinion on any matter concerning their welfare and to have that opinion taken seriously.
- Children Act 2004 (DFES, 2004b) - sets out the role of the children's commissioner whose duty is to include young people in the design and delivery of services.
- Children and Families Act 2014- the Local Authority is required to appoint at least one person to promote the educational achievement of it's looked after children. That person the Virtual School Head (VSH); must implement their duty including, giving the child a voice.
- Children's Homes Regulations 2015- inspectors meet with the young people and the judgements of the home are related to the overall experiences and progress relating to the children and young people living in the home. (Inspection of children's homes, Ofsted, April 2015).

(Adapted from, DfE, 2014: 7).

There is an abundance of additional law that reinforces the need to include the voice and views of marginalised groups of young people including those looked after. The standards set out the need for services to include the young people's voices through hearing their views and listening to their experiences to improve services.

*"Thus it is clear that there is increasing awareness of the principle of hearing the voice of the recipient of services. Having a principle, even one that is enshrined in law, however does not ensure good practice."* (Golding et al, 2006: 3)

Golding et al (2006) also go onto cite research conducted by Stuart and Baines (2004) as part of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation whereby their study concluded that, at an individual level, children and young people were not being consulted in the right way with respect to decisions that affect their lives.

The complexity of how services take the views, wishes and feelings of the young person into account and the interplay in relation to ensuring that the young person is appropriately safeguarded remains in quandary. Schofield, (2005) highlights the tensions between the young person's right to participate in decision making and the right to be protected. This is further expanded in relation to the young persons' experience in that it is likely that the young person has experienced adversity within their family which can lead to difficulty in thinking, naming and understanding associated feelings whilst having autonomy. These complex competing emotions will interact; thus making it difficult to understand and therefore express wishes and feelings related to their care (Schofield, 2005).

There is a dichotomy when seeking young people's views in this area whereby the young people share their strong desire to be reunited with family members that are no longer able to protect and care for them; the powerful feelings when this does not happen and then the feelings associated with not being heard (Billington, 2006).

This issue was highlighted by the young people in this study and in particular Kay reiterated the feeling of not being heard. The way Kay described her feelings with regards to this made me consider how and what Kay and the other young people were asked, in the past, about their wishes and feelings. At one particular point Kay in relationship to school staff starts the sentence with "*they should have asked me how I felt and they never did...*" the simplicity in this is basic but yet powerful and needs no explanation as Kay sums her feelings up. The notion of Kay not being asked something as simple as 'how do you feel' presents many dilemmas when as practitioners we are constantly devising systems to access young people's voice. Kay and the other young people's experiences leave me to reflect that somewhere in the assessment and systematic processes we need to ask simply how the young person is feeling about, and experiencing the decisions made about them.

The interplay between the young person's feelings of not being heard and the adult outwardly trying to elicit their voice is described by Mcleod (2007) as 'power plays'.

This in particular relates to the young person rejecting the adults' agenda and trying to impose their own. McLeod (2007) goes on to describe the reason being due to the adult's agenda being flawed and the need for acceptance of this by professionals, agencies and national policy makers. The notion of the adult agenda being imposed on to the young people is also reinforced by Spicer and Evans (2006). Specifically if we want to truly hear young people's voices we have to hear what is on their agenda, rather than impose our own (p.78). However that said there is an inherent complexity in trying to capture young people's voice when they have competing thoughts and feelings that may not necessarily be coherent especially with regards to how they view their care and best interests.

Billington (2006) outlines this further in relationship to adult anxiety and the dilemmas that exist in relationship to eliciting and representing young people's voice whilst balancing this in decision making processes. Billington (2006) explores the ethical principles relating to representing voice of the young people and the 'messiness' that exists when there is disagreement.

*"I will argue that current anxieties about our young are in part a smoke screen for our own adult anxieties- about how we should be in the world, about normality and about our own futures and sense of mortality."* (Billington, 2006:3)

It could be viewed that this duality lends to keeping our experiences separate when we are bound by the same concepts, constructs, hierarchies and structures.

Young people in the current study reminded me of this premise often, for example through Carl saying 'treat us like human beings'. The young people on a number of occasions made reference to respect, the power of understanding and the feeling of being understood. Clearly these are notions that adults and young people equally value in relationships. Essentially these relationships are bound by power and how we have experienced power in previous adult child relationships. This conceptualisation could be viewed with reference to the work of Fonagy (2002) where the young person's experience of the environment is considered in more depth using an attachment based framework. Further consideration will be given to this premise in the next section.



## 6.2 Importance of empathy in school based relationships

Empathy according to Baron-Cohen (2012) is “*our ability to identify what someone else is thinking or feeling and respond to their thoughts and feelings with an appropriate emotion*” (p. 167). The ability to empathise rests on the ability to understand others, which communicates to them that they are understandable and valued. Empathy allows us to understand others and the perspectives they hold, thoughts and feelings have been heard, acknowledged and respected (Baron-Cohen, 2012). The findings in the present study highlighted that the young people were seeking empathic care from the adults in their educational settings.

In defining empathic care, it's the feelings associated with care that are of particular concern and those that are ascribed within an attachment care giving framework. Here I return to the earlier attachment definition as “*an affectional bond between two individuals that endures through time and space and serves to join them emotionally*” (In Archer and Burnell, 2003: 63). Again, it is helpful to think of attachment not as an ‘all or nothing’, but on a continuum ranging from secure, developing and enriching relationships between a child and a range of adults, to a complete absence of any such relationship. In other literature, this absence has been referred to as *Reactive Attachment Disorder*, which is a psychiatric diagnosis (Horner, 2008). Thinking of attachment issues in this way can unhelpfully lead to the assumption that the problem rests within the child, rather than being an interaction between the child's feelings of insecurity and the social environment in which they are living.

Fonagy (2002) develops this concept further and describes attachment as not an end in itself but:

*“a system adapted by evolution to fulfil key ontogenetic physiological and psychological tasks. The traditional attachment model is clearly circular... We conceptualise attachment as a process that brings into being complex mental life from a complex and adaptable behavioural system.”* (Fonagy, 2002: 33).

The interviews with the young people highlighted the difficulties in relationships between CYPLA and teachers. The attachment trauma framework is used to describe the difficulty in the relationships that the young people experienced. This framework has been adapted from those presented earlier in the review of the literature in this area. Many CYPLA experience difficulties that arise from

attachment issues and trauma, either from their past or from continuing experiences. Miens et al (2002) develop this further though describing the concept of 'mind-mindedness' in early relationships whereby this develops in infancy between the caregiver. The process involves the caregiver becoming able to reflect their own mind whilst tuning in to the mind of the infant thus over time enabling the infant to reflect on their own feelings so as to allow them to feel contained and not overwhelmed.

In applying these concepts to the current research it could be that what the young people were identifying their experiences which were based on their mentalisation of early key relationships. This could be illustrated through the example of when the young people were seeking care, there was a complex interplay of seeking an aspect of this from what may be lacking from an earlier relationship. It could be assumed that the adults in education were trying to provide the same level of care (*loco parentis*) that they would for all the young people in their care, this was misinterpreted and there was a mismatch of perception which led to a fragmentation of experience as shared by Kay and Carl. The young people in this study repeatedly made reference to lack of adults caring, questioning the adults that cared for them and at times rejecting the care that they were offered. This could be viewed with reference to the young people not having experienced safe and secure relationships thus having limited opportunities to develop their capacity to recognise theirs and others feelings.

Schofield and Beek (2009) identify that in adolescence, attachment relationships are known to evolve alongside other developmental changes, so that cognitive and social developmental shifts occur (p. 257). In their longitudinal study of 52 children in planned, long term foster care (1996-2006) they use their findings to propose that a secure base parenting model is needed to support children and young people in care. The authors highlight the cumulative effect of trust or lack of trust and the impact of this on all areas of development and not just relationships. In their research they focus on adolescence as a period of uncertainty where the young persons' ability to express feelings without overwhelming them or others is tested. The young person looked after is presented with specific challenges in their search for an identity, increased consciousness of helplessness, difference and stigma (p. 261).

In examining this further, the research presented by Edwards (2016) also provides an additional framework where she cites Emotional Labour theory as a way of understanding the complex interplay of supporting young people looked after. Edwards (2016) cites previous research where CYPLA explained that they wish for teachers to be more 'understanding, nice, caring and loving'. (Honey et al, 2011: 43). Additionally Grieg (2008) highlights that children with traumatic histories and their teachers have intense times together without an explanation and little or no information to support their relationship. Edwards (2016) proposes that the term Emotional Labour be employed by teachers given the strong feelings that may be evoked. The role of the theory is to facilitate positive relationships between young people looked after and teachers so that positive outcomes are achieved. Research by Sharrocks (2014) also identified that teachers are better able to care for pupils when they were in receipt of sessions that focused on their care and wellbeing.

To this end we could view the findings from the current study in relationship to facilitating educationalists and those in loco parentis roles to hear the experiences of the young people more effectively. It could be assumed that the young people may always have a sense of injustice of carrying a primal wound and thus a feeling of never being heard.

### **6.3 The idea of 'space' in key adult relationships**

In the current study the young people were identifying their lack of privacy and their need for space whilst their lives were in the public social care domain. Whilst also stating that they were looking for a specific response and they would get this on some occasions from adults caring for them and not during other times. In this section I will give consideration to the polarisation of experiences described by the young people. I will go on to consider the need for adults in residential homes and adults in school to create a secure base whilst respecting the need for space and privacy.

With regards to the aims of the current research in trying to find how EPs are able to better facilitate positive outcomes for CYPLA in education it maybe that we turn to the experiences that the young people presented with regards to their care in the residential homes. There is a lack of research in the area of the unique experiences

that CYPLA have with regards to living in a residential setting and the impact on their education. Specifically, research outside of education and specific to residential care will be presented here in trying to address how do we create a sense of a secure base for the young person living in a residential setting whilst managing the young persons need for autonomy and privacy?

The young people in the current study described there being a lack of privacy, that adults despite being well meaning were interfering and interrupting their space. Whether this was through the social worker sharing their private lives with educationalists or whether this was being disturbed, interrupted in living in a residential setting. The young people in this study are likely to have had a disrupted pattern of care in relationship to independence, autonomy and boundaries. This could have been whether in their birth families or subsequent foster/adoption placements prior to them entering the residential homes.

Beek and Schofield (2004) present the concept of secure base towards understanding its significance for foster children. They carried out a three year longitudinal study with 58 foster children and set out to explore the foster parenting offered to the children. Their findings provide a complex picture of the families grappling with systemic issues, birth family contact, school issues and traumatic histories. However the children and families moved towards trying to create stability and constructive lives and despite relationship strains there was capacity to have some sense of intimacy, enjoyment and the children valued some sense of what they describe as 'ordinary parenting' and care.

*“The concept of providing a secure base for older children as a necessary form of therapeutic foster parenting is helpful here. This more adequately describes the sensitive, strategic, planned and focussed parenting, the “parenting plus” that provided healing for these older children, who in almost all cases had experienced great adversity prior to their foster placements.”*

(Beek and Schofield, 2004: p. 265)

The above research evidences the importance of secure base for children looked after, the need to carefully match the capacity of substitute carer's emotional availability to manage strong emotions, attune and create an emotional space. Walker (2008) sets out qualities of substitute carers and considers them in relation to adoption and fostering. Here I wish to extend these qualities to consider them in the

context of Carers in residential home as the young people were actively seeking these qualities both in a school and home setting. Kay, Carl and Kameron emphasised the importance of adults creating a safe space whether this was in relationship to this being available in school or home, they simply wished and appreciated when it was there.

The three aspects for Foster carers that Walker (2008) puts forward include:

- The ability to manage a wide range of feelings, both in themselves and others;
- The resolution of any losses or traumas that have been experienced by the adult;
- The acquisition of reflective functions.

(Walker, 2008: 49)

In considering the above points Walker (2008) suggests that we assess the adults' capacity to be in touch with a range of emotions internal and external so that they connect to the feelings and emotions of the young people in their care. Herein there is a dilemma in that the residential carers are offered a different status to foster carers, both in the rewards and gains offered to them, whether financial or relational. The foster carer is caring for the young person on a fairly consistent basis in a family institutional context, whether as an individual or as part of a couple. However the residential children's home carer is supporting the young person within the context of a different set of institutional rules, beliefs and ideologies which include a range of adults in the young people's lives, creating rules and safety measures. The young people in this situation in its very nature will be experiencing a host of relationship/relational approaches.

These experiences relating to a secure base are further compounded by the way that the young people have experienced attachment relationships in their past. Early in life children begin to mentalize their care giver's mind but only if it is safe to do so. Hughes (2009) puts forward that if the mentalization involves a perception that the care giver 'hates' the child or similar, the child will experience fear and terror and 'switch off' their developing mentalizing ability (as it is too painful) and an important foundation for empathy is lost (Hughes, 2009).

This is further compounded when trying to understand and apply the concept of reflective functioning in the residential homes. Fonagy (1999) defines this process as '*the understanding of self and others as intentional beings whose behaviour is organised by mental states, thoughts, feelings, beliefs and desires*' (Fonagy, 1999:2). If this extended to a range of adults in a caring role, the young person is likely experiencing a host of responses relating to adults trying to interpret and ascribe meaning to the young person's emotions and behaviour. This was evident in an account where Chloe refers to one of the managers in the home as a *real character* and as somebody that she could *trust*. The young people in this study expressed the importance of self-awareness in adults whether in the home or school setting. Reflective functioning is a way of modelling how to manage, contain and hold feelings good or bad. Walker (2008) concludes that a key role for substitute carers is to help the young person to increase their capacity for reflective function and their own self-awareness (2008: 52).

Happer et al (2006) put forward research that evidences a number of participants who identified factors relating to a secure base including feeling accepted, secure and having a sense of belonging in residential care. Their research highlights celebrating success and promoting positive outcomes for young people looked after. They conclude that an important feature in creating this was ensuring positive relationships with a continuing ongoing sense of security and safety in children's homes that the young people were able to rely upon (2007:17).

Kendrick (2013) proposes that children in residential care have a wide and contrasting experience which is not always negative. Bolger and Miller (2012) and Elsely, (2011) also describe that young people's views on their residential care will change over time, both on a daily basis with regards to what's happening in the home and outside within their birth family. In the current study I had the opportunity to return to my interviews and notably some of the young people expressed their views with reference to how they felt about their situation dependent on their feelings on the day. For example, Charlotte on my second visit was waiting for her social worker and felt let down, angry and vocalised this about her social worker cancelling her visit. Chloe's focus was disrupted by the presence of other young people in the home and she complained of the noise, volume and disruption that she felt was coming from the other residents at the time of the interview.

In considering the secure base here, I also return to the family metaphor whereby Kendrick (2013) proposes that this is a way that some young people can express positive aspects of their experience. Kay describes her relationship with the manager and states *“that’s the Manager B, and if I really want something I call him my Uncle B!”* Kay goes on to describe his personal qualities including him staying calm and never shouting or ‘losing it’. Berridge (2002) considered a range of studies that evidence the importance of the quality of the interaction between young person and the adults. The range of terms to describe the quality of these relationships included, empathy, approachability, persistence, willingness to listen and reliability (2002:86).

Kendrick (2013) concludes that researchers and practitioners need to locate residential home experiences in to a wider conceptual agenda.

*“It is in understanding children’s and young people’s centrality in the complex mesh of relationships, relatedness, and relationships that residential care must find its true potential.”* (Kendrick, 2008: 83)

## **6.4 Importance of school based relationships with peers and adults**

The current study elicited the experiences of the young people in relation to how they viewed others in a school setting and to establish if relationships featured in their educational experiences. The responses of the young people indicated that they had a reliance on adults for support and they viewed friendships as a way of having connectedness and intimacy with others.

One of the issues that the young people identified was related to the transient nature of their care and education. There was a sense from the young relating to their struggle in forming close relationships. The experiences presented by the young people could be explained using an attachment based framework. In that attachment is a process that takes time and the key to its formation is trust and trust becomes secure only after repeated testing. Healthy attachment takes a couple of years of cycling through mutually positive interactions. During this process the child learns to trust that his needs will be met in a consistent and nurturing manner and that the child ‘belongs’ to his family, and they to him. Reciprocity (the mutual meeting of needs, give and take) these must be consistently present for an extended period of

time, for healthy, secure attachment to take place (Becker-Weidman, 2006). For children and young people looked after this pattern is usually disrupted and likely to be developmentally 'stuck' which has implications for the young person's understanding of future relationships and their capacity to form connectedness with others.

In addition to this there is also the way that the young people view themselves in relation to others, the internal working model that is validated through their interactions with others. The Internal Working Model (IWM) controls the attachment behavioural systems and it is developed through the way that children are cared for early on thus allowing them to develop a sense of who they are in the world. Howe (2011) sums the IWM as a construction of mental models relating to how the world has worked in the past, and might work in the future (p39). The way that we process information through our senses and give meaning to it from what we have experienced in the past which then influences how we are and who we are. Kay makes this point very clearly and in describing herself in the interview she stated "*It's just how I am... It's just the way I am*".

The key attachment figures both maternal and paternal are important in the way that the environment is perceived, positive and negative, safe or unsafe. These repeated experiences' relating to interactions with the primary care givers allows infants to develop mental representations of the world (IWM) and forms the infants sense of worthiness based on the carers availability and willingness to provide care and protection (Howe 2011: 33). If the infant experiences a repeated sense of safety, availability and security this is how they will view the world.

Egeland (2004) puts forward that these mental states and internal representations can change over time with alternative positive experiences which can assist the child in developing alternative behavioural systems. More recently research carried out in this area by Educational Psychologists, Ubha and Cahill (2014), presented findings whereby IWMs of CYPLA had positively shifted when adults used attachment based interventions in supporting the young people in school. Their research highlighted the need for children to have a 'secure base' in the form of a key attachment figure in school, namely a teaching assistant or a learning support assistant.



The research evidence put forward by Ubha and Cahill (2014) reinforces the need for schools to be supported in understanding the secure base concepts, to attune to the needs that the child is presenting and sensitively addressing those in relationship to help build and promote a secure attachment. The way that schools can facilitate this has been described in the earlier chapters and the way that educationalists are able to influence new alternative realities for the young people gives a sense of purpose and hope. The young people shared their experiences of relationships across schools in two extremes where there was support but also rejection in relationship to feeling bullied and as an outsider. Additional factors including managed school moves, transitions and family changes influenced the way that the young people experienced school based relationships.

Sebba et al (2015) consider frequent transitions in relationship to the educational progress of children looked after in England. The data that they present as part of the REES Centre's research in Fostering and Education identifies both school changes and placement changes as risk factors for educational progress. Their findings highlighted that young people attributed progress to the characteristics, skills and commitment of individual teachers. As in the current study they also found that the young people named individual teachers and their approach being one of care, persistence, respect and an awareness of what was happening in the young person's life. Pupils also identified those that they perceived to be insensitive and ineffective (Sebba et al 2015: 7). The recommendations that they put forward include a need for further research towards understanding the quality of interventions and initiatives in the area of exclusion both internal and external where young people are likely not accessing high quality teaching and in the area of school transfer.

The findings in this review conclude that it is likely to be a complex combination of pre care experiences and potentially in care experiences such as placement instability that impact on poor educational outcomes. In both of the above reviews, the importance of teachers, pastoral support and school support staff were identified by young people as the main detriments of educational progress. The carers support outside of school was not the main determinant of educational progress (Sebba et al, 2015: 6). The findings in this review would also reflect those in the present study, where most of the young people highlighted the importance of teachers and school staff ensuring their success with education. In the present study, the young people

particularly Kay, Kameron and Carl reflected on their positive and negative relationships with key members of staff and the impact of this on their daily school lives.

Sugden's (2013) research highlights the importance of teacher and peer group for CYPLA. Their study set out to consider what supports learning and whilst peers were important the emphasis was on the teacher child relationship due to the priority that the children placed on this relationship. Sugden (2013) emphasises "*whilst peers are important their role can be seen as both constructive and challenging with regards to learning.*" (p. 377). This issue has also been explored by Brewin and Statham (2011) who consider the impact of transition from Primary to secondary school for children looked after. Their research findings relayed the importance of peer relationships during transition in that these relationships could help the process of moving.

In the current study, friendships and peer relationships were described as being important in the context of being in school. Equal importance and reliance was given to adults in a supporting role. Carl in particular shared that whilst in his younger years he relied on his friends this changed for him as he entered his teenage years. This seemed to be an unusual response given the research in this area would identify the importance of peers and friends for young people looked after during adolescence (McClung and Gayle, 2010). This did make me consider the context of Carl's response, notably he had moved schools over six times and for Carl he may have viewed adults to be essential in settling him and providing a sense of security. There is also predictability and availability of adults that he may have found lacking in his peers. In the current study the experiences relating to school based relationships were grounded in how the young people experienced these interactions.

The young people in this current study also identified feelings of rejection through bullying. This could be in relationship to their experiences of attending a new school, resource, provision and finding that relationships with the other children were already established whilst they were outsiders trying to look in without support. It could be argued that the experiences related to bullying triggered feelings of rejection. Whereby they were trying to position themselves in a new unfamiliar environment and finding that they were considered outsiders. Side and Johnson (2014) put

forward this point in their analysis of past research in this area where they described the rhetoric that surrounds the topic of bullying in schools.

Bullying in schools has been widely discussed and reported, policies implemented and prevention advocated (Direct Gov bullying, 2016, Secondary SEAL 2010, Beatbullying, 2016). However Side and Johnson (2014) argue that in spite of the extensive research in this area bullying still continues (p. 218). They concluded that discourse around bullying focussed on the behavioural manifestations rather than the way that it made individuals feel. Additionally they report that none of the descriptions and policies focus on the subjective nature of how the young people are affected as a result of being bullied and what the experience of being bullied means to them (Side and Johnson, 2014: 226).

In the present study bullying featured alongside many other rejections and losses that the young people experienced. I found that the young people were trying to gain some acceptance from their peers and when bullied the feelings of isolation and rejection were interlinked to earlier experiences of care. However they took control of their situation and tackled bullying head on rather than turn to adults for support. Again this response would indicate the self-reliance and self-preservation that the young people were accustomed to in addressing and trying to resolve their feelings around relationships.

## **6.5 Transitions, managing loss and achieving aspirations**

The overarching need for the young people to move away from their childhoods and move towards adulthood and independence was evident throughout the interviews. The young people shared their aspirations, need to achieve and saw education as a means towards accessing work and independence, but also reflect on their struggle to engage with the processes involved. Reference has already been made to the educational experiences of young people looked after in residential care. However as research progresses in this area there is a sizeable shift from the trajectory of failure, sense of hopelessness towards consideration of factors that promote better outcomes and consider factors that led to achievement. Over the last two decades there has been a huge emphasis on improving quality of care offered in residential homes. This has included improved regulations and inspection standards that have

created a shift towards a more rigorous approach towards supporting and caring for young people in residential settings. One of the quality standards set out in the Department for Education regulations (2015) is the education standard which states:

*“The education standard is that children make measurable progress towards achieving their educational potential and are helped to do so (p. 25)*

In particular that staff:

- Help each child to achieve the child’s education and training targets, as recorded in the child’s relevant plans.
- Support each child’s learning and development, including helping the child to develop independent study skills and, where appropriate, helping the child to complete independent study.
- Understand the barriers to learning that each child may face and take appropriate action to help the child to overcome any such barriers.
- To help each child to understand the importance and value of education, learning, training and employment.

Adapted from DfE Children Homes Regulations 2015.

The regulations take into consideration that children placed in residential settings will have additional needs including ‘severe trauma’ and that it may be necessary to work through the impact of this on the individual before participating in learning and formal education (p. 25). The nature of this support and how to work through the impact of the trauma is not the business of the regulations. The evidence from the young people in the current study could give some indication to what this support looks like. The young people in the present study described what supports their education and helps them to achieve, including adults showing empathy, accepting the young person and not judging their situation, overall a compassion focussed education system. Similar findings have been reported in wider reviews including Brodies (2010) large scale review which considered factors that promote and improve educational outcomes for CYPLA. There were 17 studies in this category including young people living in residential care. The findings reported that the studies, research, projects in this area emphasised the value that the young people placed on recognition and celebration of achievement.

Furthermore, there is a need to enhance better outcomes whilst the young people continued to be cared for by the local authority. Once the young people enter 'care leaver' status the statistics show a significant difference with regards to opportunity and positive outcomes. Based on 2016 data, of the 26,340 former care leavers aged 19, 20 and 21 years old, 10,460 (40%) were not in employment, education or training (NEET), compared with 14% of all 19 to 21 year olds (DfE, 2016). The statistics show that the percentage of care leavers who are NEET has risen by one percentage point in each of the last 2 years. The increase is seen in the categories for NEET due to illness or disability, and NEET due to pregnancy or parenting (DfE, 2016: 13).

## 6.6 Managing losses

*"In popular psychology, mourning is often equated with getting over a loss. But do we ever get over our losses? Don't we, rather, make them part of our lives in different ways, sometimes fruitfully, sometimes catastrophically, but never painlessly?"*

(Leader, 2008: 4)

This section addresses the importance of the young people's feelings around their losses and how adults supported them through their losses utilising an empathic approach. In the section I make reference to the insurmountable losses faced by the young people, and I was only able to capture some of their experiences, and many they acknowledged they were unable to remember/retrieve. Kay's extracts illustrates this when she describes "I lost loads" when sharing her experiences of past family relationships. Charlotte particularly had difficulty in recalling things from 'years ago'.

Beek and Schofield (2009) also make reference to the above in their research, in that many of the children in their study had endured great loss and maltreatment and as time passed, the meaning of this had often become more apparent or more distant to them with associated distressing and forgotten (buried) memories.

The young people acknowledged the pain of their losses was probably too much for some school staff, which led them not to share at all. Loss can be described according to the work of Bowlby (in Howe, 2011) as a feeling of great pain and despair especially when relating to an attachment figure. The young people in the current study were attempting to resolve their losses through their own means and

self-reliance. The findings illustrate that they would accept empathic support if offered but would not seek it. This could be linked to their experience of establishing trust in relationships and how they struggled view adults in a trusting role.

The work of Hughes (2004) highlights that many children who have experienced trauma and loss need nurturance in this area. The capacity to ask for help is not something that is readily available for some so it has to be facilitated through an empathic response.

*“Nurturance means teaching the child hundreds of times how to ask for help, how to live with the consequences of one’s choices, how to learn to trust someone who has the power to abuse but will never do so...”*

(Hughes, 2004: 263)

There is also the expectation amongst ‘professionals’ that children and young people will quickly overcome their losses, more so if they have been removed from an adverse family situation. The young people in the current study highlighted the lack of understanding by adults and the lack of mourning and grieving space available to them during their separation from family and and/or care experience. This was apparent in Chloe’s accounts specific to being separated from her mother and then her foster carer, whom she described with strong negative feelings. She mourned the loss of her mothers care and questioned the replacement care that she received from the foster carer. Chloe was understandably questioning the decision making around her care and adults lack of understanding of her losses. Equally, Kay was able to recount the number of family losses that she had experienced pre care and whilst in care.

## **6.7 Achieving Aspirations**

The framework of resilience is revisited here as a way of considering the aspirations that the young people shared. In earlier sections I presented that there is perhaps an over reliance on ‘within’ factors related to resilience, as a way of understanding young people looked after and their achievements and successes. The research evidence presented considered the importance of resilience and the varied ways in which some children looked after did well in the face of adversity (Botrell, 2009; Newman, 2004; Gilligan, 2000; Luthar and Cicchetti, 2000).

The current study would be lending itself towards considering the importance of the adults' resilience in being able to offer the support necessary. Drapeau et al (2007) also point towards the relationship of trust in caring adults which facilitates 'turning points' and allow resilient adaptations to be made. The research carried out by Honey et al (2011) also considers self-perceptions and resilience in CYPLA and their findings suggested that it was the 'normalisation', not being treated differently or singled out that were important environmental factors that facilitated and enhanced resilience. Their research highlighted that generally the CYPLA held more positive perceptions of their achievements compared to their non-looked after peers. They also highlighted that the CYPLA had lower career aspirations compared to their non-looked after peers.

The young people in the present study viewed college studies and achievements as their 'ticket out' of the care system. They were ambitious and despite their past school experiences relating to exclusions and school moves they were optimistic about their further education studies. This is particularly positive against the back drop of employment outcomes for care leavers in England reported as particularly poor, with around a third not in education, employment or training (NEET) at the age of 19 ( (DfE, 2010a).

In relationship to educational achievement there is a view that there is too much priority given to education and improving GCSE results at the cost of emotional health and wellbeing.

*"This seems less imperative when set against the emotional cost to the children and young people themselves (and society at large) since far too many of these children end up with life limiting outcomes including being homeless, jobless, friendless, and deeply unhappy."*

(Cameron and Maginn, 2011: 45).

Whilst the above paints a bleak fatalistic picture the focus should be on how young people are provided with opportunities and are emotionally ready and prepared to access learning. In keeping with the current study and findings of a number of other studies (e.g. Allen, 2003; Cameron, 2007, Driscoll, 2009), the young people displayed an admirable level of motivation and resilience in pursuing their education and career plans in the face of significant practical and emotional challenges

(Driscoll, 2009). In the current research the young people were ambivalent towards the educational support available in a college setting. They were very much aware about what was available and on offer but reluctant to access it unless absolutely necessary. Both, Kameron and Kay described how this support served a purpose and yet in interpreting some of the meaning behind this ambivalence, it is likely that the support was viewed by them to only address their issues at a superficial level.

Kameron particularly shared that he knew which support worker was available and offered support to him in college but he was reluctant to engage with the process of receiving this support. This theme of a strong sense of self-reliance is also evident in wider research in this area and is presented as positive attribute by the young people (Samuel and Pryce, 2008, Cameron, 2007, Driscoll, 2011). The work of Driscoll (2011) and the above researchers in this area remind educationalists that '*whilst self-reliance may be indicative of resilience, it may also undermine the making of supportive relationships.*' (p.143).

In supporting young people to fulfil their potential and achieve their aspirations, a key point raised in this study is the value of protective environmental factors as well as the resilient nature of adults in a supportive role. Consideration will be given to how EPs can facilitate the relationship between supportive adult and young person so that there is a counter resilience and emotional readiness to access and continue with learning.

## **6.8 EP role in facilitating a Secure Holding Base**

It is the work of Ainsworth et al. (1978) that is used as a starting point to consider the importance of a secure base for adolescents. Ainsworth et al. (1978) put forward the notion of the attachment figure being fundamental to the infant's exploration of their environment and using the attachment figure (mother) as a secure base to develop their curiosity. In the present study, there were several examples where the young people shared experiences relating to the need for a secure base in the context of school and the residential home. This was particularly evident in the subordinate theme relating to adaptations made by adults and in relation to sensory space. Providing a secure base is fundamental to the development of attachment in children (Bowlby, 1969). The concept can be extended towards belonging to and being part



of a relational system including schools and residential homes (Foster homes as described in Schofield and Beek, 2009). Attachment research (Hughes, Akin-Little, 2007) has further documented three basic conditions for facilitating a secure base:

1. **Open communication** —————> Explicit communication between teacher and child about the negative emotions that may arise from learning
2. **Continuity of relationships**—————> Stability in class with same teachers and peers
3. **Sensitive discipline** —————> Consistent discipline with structure and acceptance from teachers and peers

(Adapted from Hughes, Akin-Little, (2007) in Ubha and Cahill, (2014: 289).

In facilitating a secure base in schools and residential homes we have to revisit concepts relating to adults being able to detect the young person's need for closeness without them explicitly expressing this. The follow up to this would be with an adult in a supporting role then being able to sensitively address this need. The ultimate aim being that within schools there is capacity to extend this role towards an identified key attachment figure in the educational environment. Harker et al (2003) in their research found that young people most commonly cited teachers as their source of support. It is in the development of including teachers and senior leadership stakeholders understanding of facilitating a secure base that change would be possible. A point echoed in Honey et al (2007) study where the young people looked after desired teachers to be more "*understanding, nice, caring and loving*" (p.43)

However, I am aware that the above concepts could be viewed to be idealistic in the context of current pressures and limitations that exist within our educational system (Scott, 2009). The young people were also mindful of this in their descriptions of power and the way that adults in a position of authority viewed them. Carl was particularly keen on putting forward his experiences of senior teachers and as he described his experience of their lack of warmth and empathy.

Revisiting the emotional labour concept presented earlier Kinman, Way and Strange (2011) put forward that teacher's roles will involve a high level of emotional labour. Isenberger and Zembylas (2006) assert that teaching involves an element of emotional labour to the extent that teachers are likely to hide or avoid displaying disappointment and present a caring persona to pupils.

The conflict arises when the young person is seeking an aspect of an attachment relationship that may not be on offer. For example, teachers may seek to avoid becoming highly attached to individual pupils as to avoid taking on the difficult emotions that may impact on their feelings and being able to teach (Yin and Lee, 2008). This creates an unhelpful dynamic that often hinders the development of trust and thus increasing the need for the young person to become self-reliant. Whilst self-reliance should be celebrated in its own right here, however it can be viewed to be damaging in facilitating secure-base behaviour.

In reference to secure-base behaviours the research in this area has shown that children's sense of security is fundamentally influenced by consistency, responsiveness and attunement that they have experience in their primary relationships (Howe, 2011). Whilst the work of Bowlby (1969) addresses the concept of attachment and loss, the work of Winnicott (1971) considers the paradox of our primary relationships. Moreover the notion of an external secure base in relationship to a parent figure facilitating exploration versus an inner exploration where there is mutual recognition for the infant to "destroy". Winnicott (1971) argues that the mutual recognition of infant and parent depends on an active interaction in which the infant repeatedly negates or "destroys" the parent in fantasy, with the parents' task being not to retaliate in reality so that the child can say "Hello object I destroyed you!" (Holmes, 2000, p. 32). There are also the two polarised views here in relationship to loss whereby Bowlby views loss as a significant marker in the infants' development that needs resolving whilst Winnicott can be interpreted to view the limits of nurturance as an essential part of growing up. The theoretical frameworks remind us of the complex interplay of emotion when trying to interpret these in the context of a classroom/school environment.

The above concepts are extended towards more current applications in considering the school as a holding environment (Hyman, 2012). The concepts developed by

Hyman (2012) are specific to psychodynamic processes of mentalization which are applied to classroom and school based relationships. The process of mentalization is whereby the child is able to recognise and make sense of others actions which Fonagy describes as “Keeping the other’s mind in mind” (Hyman, 2012: 206). In extending these concepts to school based relationships, Hyman argues the need to include Winnicott’s psychodynamic principles in facilitating a holding environment. The principles of empathic mother/child interaction and the capacity to mentalize are of key importance. The holding environment constitutes of adults that are empathically attuned to the needs of the child, the child feels connected, valued and has a sense of belonging. The adults are required to contain their own issues and be flexible in their attuned approach and to remind themselves and others to “*keep the mind and emotions of the child in focus*” (Hyman 2012: 215). This approach enables and facilitates the child’s feelings of security and self-agency whilst also increasing staff’s morale and feeling connected and appreciated. Hyman (2012), describe schools as not only as a place to educate but to also develop attachment relationships based on mentalization processes. The holding approach considers internalisation processes operating in school based relationships and psychologists as best placed to consider the complex dynamics of pupil/teacher relationship. Specifically, that the psychologist is able to listen to, hear and keep the mind of the other person in mind. By demonstrating this skill and facilitating a space for the teacher and pupil, there is a greater chance that they are able to extend the holding atmosphere. Hyman concludes that the notion of a holding environment is not exclusive to psychodynamic principles and that it could be extended to other theoretical frameworks.

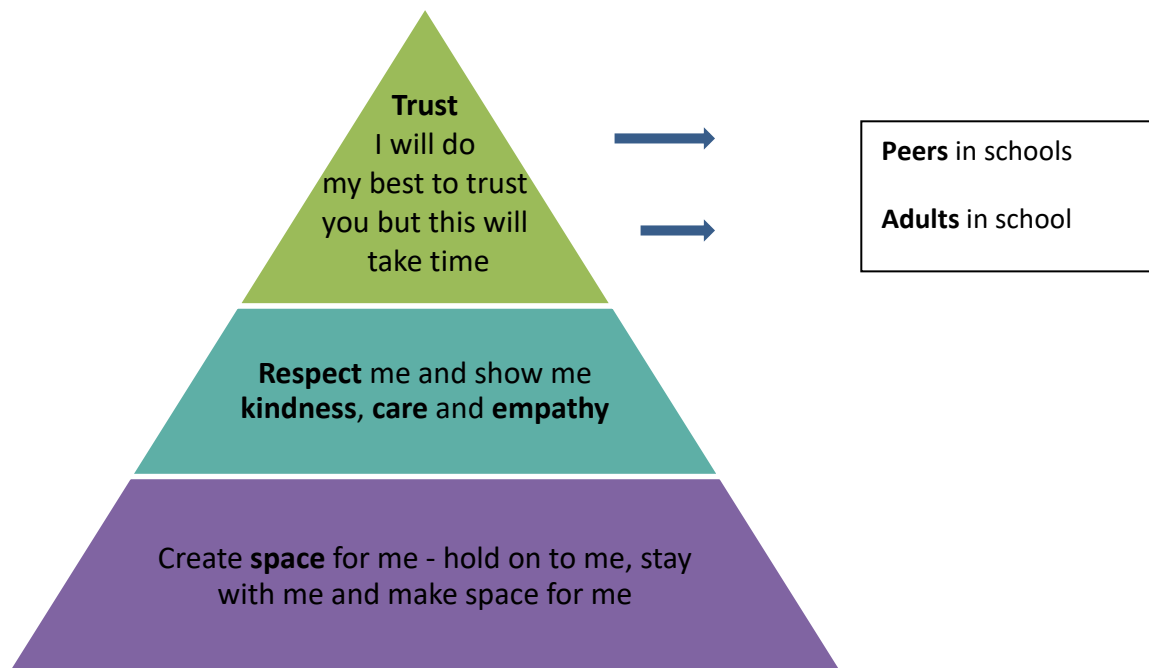
Additionally in facilitating the secure holding base environment in a school setting, the concept of emotional containment is essential towards understanding and holding all feelings and emotions displayed. Bion’s (1993) refers to the process of containment as managing to hold, tolerate, understand and ascribe meaning to all feelings. In Bion’s theory of thinking he advocated the need for a significant other in order to reduce anxiety states. Within the present study Kay was seeking containment from adults during a time in her life that evoked difficult and intolerable emotions. Kay shared her experiences relating to her care of her siblings and in the

end relinquishing this role. Kay described the difficulty of attending school whilst managing responsibilities in her home life.

The secure base model in adolescence was also used by Schofield and Beek (2009) in their growing up in foster care study. They set out five dimensions including, availability, sensitivity, acceptance, co-operation and family membership. They conclude that children thrive best when in continuous foster parenting and are offered these secure base dimensions.

In considering what the young people put forward an attempt is made to describe their experiences and interpret into a secure holding base as in figure 1; this includes what can be applied from the above theoretical principles and extended to include what the young people needed.

**Figure 2: Secure Holding Base Model for Young People- what I need?**



The Secure Holding Base Model above is trying to encapsulate what the young people reported to have helped and what they desired from adults and peers. It by no means is suggesting that by creating the above that the young person will immediately feel safe, contained and secure in their relationships with adults. The notion of the secure base above seems simplistic but it is in the doing something well and making it simple that the young people appreciated. The bureaucracy that often

surrounds the young people in relationship to statutory documents including Personal Educational Plans, CYPLA reviews and plans did not feature in any of the young people's response. Instead they shared with me what really mattered and that was how they were made to feel in the process of their care.

Previous and current research reinforces the need for young people looked after to have a space in schools to process feelings of guilt, loss and have a space to progress in their emotional responses and access learning (Winter, 2010). This has also been firmly located in the superordinate themes in the current study and the secure base model above attempts to provide some way of understanding what the young people asked of adults when providing support. Trust, feeling heard and being treated fairly were all important factors alongside having access to an environment that was flexible, enjoyable and welcoming.

In returning to the discussion of resilience once again I wonder if there is an over reliance on individuals having the capacity to be resilient in the midst of such external and internal flux. Instead would it be more helpful if adults considered that young people have the capacity to become resilient once they have been provided with the essentials which include making adaptations, socially engineering the environment and creating a climate of acceptance. There should be acknowledgement that the process will be challenging for all of those involved but inevitably if the messages with reference to belonging are repeated then there should be some shift from the original internal working model that the young person is worthy of care and others do care. In considering the IWM, Slater (2007), provides a useful critique located in her work as an Educational Psychologist. She highlights that there is more to be learnt about the exact nature of the IWM and what factors enhance resilience towards early adversity. Slater (2007) asks the questions:

*“Is it that they manage to ameliorate the potential disadvantages of a troubled working model as a result of inner cognitive abilities or personality, or as a result of environmental factors? Or do many simply learn to manage their behaviour in such a way that inner struggles are masked, resorting to self-harm, eating disorders, depression and drug and alcohol abuse when things get too much?”*

(Slater: 2007: 214)

In considering the above there may be a sense of why is a secure base concept in adolescence important or relevant to educationalists? In answer to this I return to the research that sets out evidence in considering the long term outcomes of children and young people looked after living in residential care homes. Specifically the most current research in the area identifies poor educational attainment and progress linked to poor long term outcomes related to health, criminal justice and employment (Sebba et al, 2015). The systematic research conducted by the REES Centre presents the evidence in relationship to outcomes for young people in the care system but the authors acknowledge that the research between care experiences and educational progress remains relatively unexplored. In addition the findings propose that a better understanding of this relationship should enable schools and services for children and young people to better support their education and improve outcomes (Sebba et al 2015: p.8).

The recommendations set out for future policy and practice included strategies for educational improvement that need to be addressed across the workforce in residential settings. Their findings noted that a higher proportion (18.5%) of young people looked after were taking their GCSEs who lived in residential settings.

*“This was a much broader group, than the small, residential children’s homes and included residential schools and secure units. These can be among the most challenging pupils. The residential sector in England has shrunk considerably but it is an important experience for a larger group of older, looked after adolescents”.*

(Sebba et al, 2015: 7).

## **6.9 Constructs of young people looked after**

An unexpected theme found within the current research was how the young people identified the way that they were viewed by adults in schools. This is a point that I reflect on when considering how information is presented with regards to the needs of the young person. In the accounts that the young people put forward they were keen to point out the way that they were portrayed in some cases describing themselves as ‘other’, ‘treat us like humans’ and not outsiders. The way that ‘behaviours’ are presented when school staff need EP involvement can often seem to be one sided, wrapped up in subjective experiences and negative portrayals of the young person causing them concern. This usually arises out of frustration around

staff having been tried and tested by the young person and at that point staff are not able to utilise their reflective capacity (Schofield and Beek, 2004).

There is also the additional process of inter-subjectivity that is occurring in the daily relationships between the young person and staff (Hughes, 2009). Hughes (2009) describes this process as a physical, non-verbal interactions arising out of the individuals subjective experience and impacting on the subjective experience of the other. Hughes goes on to describe this process occurring beyond infant and carer and extends it towards understanding relationships between adolescents and adults. In particular,

*'During an intersubjective experience the non verbal expressions are reciprocal and contingent... with matched emotional states (attunement), focus of attention (joint awareness), and intentions (a co-operative stance of congruent motives), the interaction is intersubjective'.* (Hughes: 2009: 126).

The focus is on developing a relationship between adult and adolescent through 'matching' affective states. Hughes points out that the adult does not have to agree with the adolescent's way of expressing themselves for them to experience empathy. The experience of having an adult attune to their inner thoughts and feelings without judgement will facilitate the young person's sense that the adults 'gets it', thus allowing the adult to have an influence on their thoughts, feelings, motives and behaviours.

Perhaps there is also some accountability that researchers, academics, theorists have to take with regards to the discourse around young people looked after. In particular the way that young people are constructed in research when living in residential care makes me want to consider an alternative discourse. Specifically Nissim (2006) considers the research on children in residential care and concludes: *'The youngsters concerned are among some of the most disadvantaged, damaged, and vulnerable members of our society and their needs are extreme and complex'.* (P. 275). Whilst this may be the case it is only when hearing young people's accounts and how they are actively seeking a shift in our thinking that we have to consider an alternative more strength based rhetoric.

The findings of Sebba et al (2015) also present young people's agency and how young people exercised control over their education. The young people in their

research described a strong sense of self-advocacy and were vocal about how services and adults should '*listen a lot, a hell of a lot. Listen, because not enough people do that*', (p.29) a theme echoed closely to the one found in this study.

A further point to note within the research is in the area of the number of children and young people in the criminal justice system living in residential care. Sands (2016) carried out research in this area for the Howard League of Penal Reform, a charity campaigning for a better justice system and reducing the number of child arrests. Sands (2016) research highlights that children in residential homes are being excessively criminalised at a much higher rate than the non-looked after population. Recent figures showed that in 2014, 6 per cent of CYPLA aged 10-17 had been convicted compared to 1 per cent of non-looked after young people, and that in 2015, 37 per cent of young people in young offender institutions were CYPLA (Sands, 2016).

The findings of this research have clear implications for young people receiving care in residential settings and their educational outcomes. Moreover, there are concerns that children's homes are significantly more likely to call the police for minor offending and disruption that would not be reported if the child was living in a family setting. In 2013, a report to the House of Commons Justice Committee stated that there needs to be more effort from local authorities in preventing the criminalisation of children in residential homes (Sands, 2016). The Howard League presents evidence where there were added staff pressures in the residential homes which led to the police being called as a way of instilling discipline in the children. This way of discipline also transfers into educational settings and CYPLA are more likely for the police to be called out to a school setting. The adults in school and the residential home may view this as the most effective way of managing CYPLA and their emotional and behavioural responses which they may not be as quick to do for non-looked after young people.



## 7.0 Conclusions and Implications for Practice

The current research has informed the need for a focus to move beyond negative and limiting trajectories in relationship to the discourse surrounding young people looked after. There has been a shift within other areas of special educational needs discourse when considering labels and moving away from pathologising children (Billington, 2009). This shift should also be embraced for children and young people looked after and EPs are in a position to challenge the way that ‘professionals’ describe and consider young people’s experiences. There is also the issue of sensitively trying to balance the wishes of the young person and appropriately safeguarding them from harm. I am fully aware that there are likely tensions in trying to balance the respect for and promotion of agency of the young person whilst working within the constraints of systematic structures.

Furthermore, the emotional power and impact of the young people narratives have strong implications for EP practice. The young people here were vocal in sharing their experiences of loss, the power of these losses and the pain experienced as a result of these will stay with me beyond this research. At the time of hearing some of the young people’s accounts I was left with a sense of my inability to fully represent their voice and I recognised the inadequacy of the researcher in these situations.

I held on to what I was able to offer, that being the young people in this study were actively seeking for their voice to be heard, to be listened to, to have a space to be heard and they valued adults that were empathic towards them. They also had a sense of social justice, where they did not want to feel rejected, isolated and sought acceptance. The young people were also looking for an emotional space and privacy with regards to that. This meant that they were craving physical and sensory space within the home and within education systems, they were asking for careful thought when it came to information sharing and the power that adults had over them. There was a need for connectedness and intimacy through relationships which were not supported by transitions and losses that they faced. There was a need for friendships and an experience of bullying which reinforced the experience of rejection. Finally the young people were looking for ways to achieve their aspirations, to have independence and central to that was the adaptations made by adults.

Voice and advocacy work continues to be the focus of EP work and there has been a large range of studies that have contributed towards this area. However there is limited research in the area of CYPLA living in residential care and education. Whilst there is a range of research and studies specific to residential homes and education separately, there is limited research in bringing the two elements together. One of my aims was to use the findings from this research to put forward ways that EPs can consider attachment based interventions beyond those that describe pathology, unmet need and vulnerability. The findings from the study identified a secure holding base model where the key attachment relationships informed by mentalization processes support the needs of the young people. I return to the words of Kay contained in the title, where she is stating clearly that it is not for her to change, but for adults and the environment to change around her.

The findings from this research advocate the need for EPs to help schools to create therapeutic spaces, hold on to the young people and the need for relationship based approaches. There needs to be a shift more now than ever to create a climate of inclusion. For research to have meaning so that it improve life chances and shifts trajectories, research like the present is powerful in shouting the message of connectedness and not isolation. EPs are essential in helping make the links between lived experiences and the way that the young people are trying to solve a problem without the psychological resources and responses afforded to them.

Sharp (2014) illustrates how Educational Psychologists can continue to develop theory, research and common awareness, alongside direct work with individuals, schools, families and communities to enable young people to perceive themselves as active agents in their lives (p. 359). A key to developing and facilitating this process is through enhancing positive relationships through promoting psychological factors and creating support networks where young people's agency can be mediated through intermediaries.

Additionally EPs are in a position to inform adults on the impact of loss and this could be further developed with reference to responding to loss using a secure holding base response. Adults working with young people in residential settings to be have a way of planning their thinking in responding to the feelings that the young people are presenting using a reflective functioning framework. Furthermore EPs to present the

work of Hughes (2009) and the PACE model derived from the concepts of intersubjective experiences. The PACE model represents playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy using an intersubjective stance. To assist adults asking questions as simple as how must this make the young person feel? How must the young person feel with regard to others? The focus of the questions to relay the notion that adults are trying to come to deeply know, accept and value and join with the young person in areas that are stressful, confusing, full of conflict and shame (Hughes, 2009).

Another feature within the research was the young people's view of friendships. An unexpected outcome was that whilst the young people viewed peer relationships to be important, they also valued their relationships with adults. At times the relationships with their peers were strained and featured bullying. EPs are in a unique position towards supporting interventions in this area. Studies highlight the importance of peer relationships for young people looked after as reported by the young people (Jackson, Pearl and Martin, 2007, Murray et al. 2011 and Blower et al.). In these studies young people in the care system stated that they were more likely to be their 'real' selves with their friends and viewed these relationships positively compared to other relationships with family and carers. The friendships were noted as important sources of ongoing support that enhanced their self-worth in comparison to transient workers who drifted in and out of the young people's lives (Murray et al, 2011). There is a need for EPs to actively ask with regards to important relationships for the young person beyond adults and how to facilitate healthy relationships. In addition to remind those caring that they are important components in the secure holding base for the adolescence as are the young people's peers.

Randall (2010) highlights that EPs are in the unique position where they can provide school staff and care homes with the training and programmes needed to facilitate positive healthy relationships. There is also a dilemma here when EPs have to question whether training is the most effective means in supporting this area. To view the EPs role at a training facilitator level is somewhat simplistic of the skills set that EPs are able to offer. It could be argued that EPs are able to offer support beyond the consultation, advice and training branch. EPs can effectively help adults and young people therapeutically process their difficult feelings and look beyond time

limited interventions. EPs are able to consider the constructs, narratives, power struggles and feelings projected by adults when trying to manage and co-ordinate untenable situations for CYPLA. EPs are in a position to help school staff to consider the behaviours presented by the young person as a defence mechanism and as a way that the young person is able to assert some control back in their lives.

Scott, (2011) addresses the issue of trying to work with individuals who have experienced negative relationships and who may not readily seek help. Scott (2011) recommends moving away from individual work and more towards forming a therapeutic alliance around the young person.

With regards to voice and gaining the young people's views I am often asked my 'professional view' of the young person and to contextualise and give meaning to the young person's behaviours. This presents challenges in itself whilst working in a local authority, multi-agency context, in that I am mindful that my view is limited with regards to the whole sum of the young person's experiences. I am also wholly aware of the power dynamic in these situations, as stated by Billington (2006) whereby in any assessment power should be considered as a crucial factor that can determine psychological practices.

Educational Psychologists are well placed to support therapeutic alliances (Scott, 2011) beyond consultation, training and advice to a range of groups, including parents, carers, educational and non-educational staff. Randall (2010) illustrates this point with reference to EPs having the ability to translate theory into practice so as to influence healthy attachments. She points out that EPs are often working in ways to reduce intrusive practices and offer the most effective intervention. Delaney (2009) recognises the tensions that exist when working therapeutically within an educational setting. EPs can facilitate therapeutic thinking and provide coaching so that school and care home staff are able to work with young people presenting with trauma, loss and insecure attachments as a result of adverse early experiences. The aim of this work would be to build on a strengths based model and to facilitate and enable the young person to become emotionally ready to access learning. The secure holding base model is another way that EPs can facilitate relationship based approaches in schools. This approach assists adults in making the adaptations needed for young people experiencing flux and loss (Hyman, 2012).

Brewin and Statham's (2011) identify the important role of EPs in supporting transitions, reducing exclusions, adversity and upheaval in young people's lives and to shift systems towards optimising life chances. Additionally the young people in the present study were seeking autonomy as also presented in McMurray et al. (2011) study where throughout their research the young people placed considerable emphasis upon being autonomous and having a sense of control in their lives. They also found that the young people in their study were seeking an emotional attachment towards a consistent adult in their lives. Studies such as the above and the current one lend to inform policy and practice in this area and reinforce the importance of facilitating healthy secure relationships with a sense of belonging for productive learning to occur. It is the notion of 'Eudaimonia' for young people looked after that instils hope and the right actions of those working in this field that will lead to change for the better.

EPs prioritise their work with vulnerable groups and some services have specialist roles dedicated to the area of CYPLA. Norwich et al (2010) present findings specific to the work that this specialist role entails including working in the area of CYPLA and multi-agency work. Their research highlighted the tensions of such working and the perceived work that EPs are able to offer in a multi-agency context. My own work in this area would relate to this finding. As part of a multi-agency team working with CYPLA, I found that designated teachers in schools would look to the EP in carrying out assessments rather than interventions. School staff would welcome individual work with CYPLA and would need coaching in understanding different ways of working. Equally work with residential home staff would involve moving them away from viewing the EP as 'expert' and moving them towards coaching and providing psycho-educational consultation to staff.

EPs work in this area is further prioritised through the local authority through its corporate parenting duties. The role of the local authority here is to ensure its statutory duties in meeting the needs of children who are in care. Sands (2016) emphasises this point further and puts forward that in 2013, the Minister of State for Children and Families, Edward Timpson (MP) highlighted to Director of Children's Services in local authorities that he wanted them:

*“to have a real sense of parental responsibility for their children’s outcomes. This concern should encompass their education, their health and welfare and their aspirations as they enter adulthood.”* (Quoted in Sands 2016: 8)

There is a national agenda in improving behaviour in schools and the recent Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools advice to school staff (DfE, 2016) specifically considers the underlying reasons for ‘disruptive behaviour’. One of the many factors identified includes ‘loss, separation and trauma’ and how these life events can impact on pupil behaviours. There are specific recommendations for staff to develop a sense of belonging and connectedness in order to improve pupils’ mental health. EPs are best placed to work with schools in developing staffs understanding of the impact of these life events and help facilitate connectedness. Furthermore, findings from the current study would support the need for educationalists to consider how the staff in their institutions hear the voice of their young people when they are in crisis. The findings from the current study could be used to support staff in developing a connectedness policy which forms part of the wider behaviour policy for the educational setting.

Additionally, the work of Edwards (2016) in the area of emotional labour can be extended by supporting adults in increasing their resilience. Their study highlighted that teachers at times wished to fulfil their pupil’s needs over their own which raises the issue of how best to support the teacher’s well-being when in a supportive role. Emotional consonance and feelings of shock were reported with regards to reports of children’s disclosures and there is a role for the EP here in managing emotional responses and containing feelings associated with the disclosures (Edwards 2016). Children and Young people’s Mental Health Coalition (2012) advocates for reflective school spaces and again at a systems level this work would be of benefit to EPs in supporting schools to better manage their pupil’s well-being in school.

On a final note, the young people in the current study were strident in making themselves heard and behaviour was their loudest voice. EPs can help staff consider and make links between the lived experiences of the young people being cared for in a residential setting and the impact that this may have on their education. At its best this work would incorporate the staff at the residential home, educational setting and the young person at the heart of it.

## 7.1 Methodological limitations of the Study

The aims of the research were to explore the educational experiences of young people looked after living in children's residential homes. The findings have illustrated that the young people valued their voice to be heard and acted upon; they needed a sense of social justice, space and privacy. The young people placed value on relationships in schools through having some sense of connectedness and intimacy whilst reaching their potential and achieving their aspirations. In light of the findings I have also considered the role of Educational Psychology and how best to support young people looked after achieve better outcomes at a systems and an individual level. The following sections will address the limitations of the study including some critical thoughts surrounding the methodological processes.

Young people looked after are under any circumstances a homogenous group and the findings from this small scale research by no means can be extended towards understanding and locating the experiences at a universal level. However, whilst acknowledging the limitations of a representative sample, it is also worth highlighting that the research does provide additional unique insights into an area that is often underrepresented in wider CYPLA research. Moreover, Brodie et al. (2009) systematic review into improving educational outcomes for CYPLA highlighted ongoing gaps in the evidence base. The review concludes that in order for improvements to be made in this area there needs to be a better understanding of learners, their environment and emotional and care needs.

The findings in this study hope to illustrate the way that young people looked after in residential care experience education. I wanted to capture their views, thoughts, feelings and how they ascribe meaning and present their unique experiences. I chose to use the interpretive phenomenological methodological approach to elicit meaning and interpret the young people's responses. I chose to root my research in phenomenology due to its interpretive approach which provided the methodological structure for this research. Phenomenology is not only a research approach however. It is fundamentally a philosophy, with both epistemological and ontological branches influencing knowledge development throughout its evolution in the twentieth century (Mackey, 2005: 179). In using IPA as an approach there is acknowledgement that experiential interpretations are bound by those presented by

the individual and those interpreted and analysed by the researcher (Brocki and Weardon, 2006). An essential component to the research cycle has been in the area of reflexivity, without this the research would be vacuous.

*“In acknowledging the positionality of knowledge, hermeneutics adds reflexivity to our research inquiries, turning us to meaningful questions and concerns that are culturally and historically relevant. Without this emphasis our explorations may lack depth and significance in our current world.*

*(Todris and Wheeler, 2001:6)*

Brocki and Weardon (2006) provide a critical analysis in the use of IPA as a methodological approach and reinforce the view that as a qualitative research method, IPA is inevitably subjective as no two analysts with the same data are likely to come up with an exact replication of the others' analysis. They consider that these points are recognised and welcomed by advocates, however their remains questions in relationship of validity and reliability.

Smith (2011) provides a response towards the criticisms levelled at the approach. Most significantly that IPA has its 'lens' firmly focussed on lived experience and does not have its primary concern with social context (p. 55). Smith (2011) reminds researchers of the importance of psychological research capturing a meaningful and detailed portrayal of lived experience. *'Without a centring in individual lived experience there is no IPA'*. (p. 56).

Chamberlin (2011) challenges IPA as a methodological process as being too prescriptive and notwithstanding the hermeneutic principles. Smith (2011) provides a retort to this by explaining IPAs positioning and roots the approach in phenomenology and hermeneutics, whilst recognising that there is room for adaptation. Furthermore the process in IPA is iterative however it allows the researcher to engage with the research question at an idiographic level. In considering the broad questions that I chose to explore I am uncertain that I would have been able to yield the rich data that I did if another methodological approach was chosen. On a final note there is a concern with any research that in taking an interpretive stance the researcher is constructing accounts by all means through trying to offer a deeper hermeneutic reading, however in trying to do this what was originally said and the meaning of this maybe lost in translation.



## **7.2 Implications for future research and practice**

The research findings from this study could be further developed towards understanding additional educational experiences related to young people looked after living in residential settings and their experiences of advocacy and self-agency. I would be particularly interested in considering the young people's self-esteem as learners and what enhances their self-esteem in relationship to learning.

There is also scope to develop further research in considering the way that adults support young people's engagement with education in residential care. Further research in the area of adults working in residential settings and if they are equipped with the most up to date knowledge in engaging the young person with education whilst balancing the young person's individual needs. Furthermore, more research in the area that differentiates the education experience of different groups of looked after young people, and examines the effects of gender, ethnicity and disability. I would also welcome research in the area of the criminal justice system, children in care and the implications on educational achievement.

In developing future research in this area I would advocate the need for the young person to be part of the process more fully, whereby the young people are co-researchers and are active agents in the research cycle so as to change and inform practice from the inside. The findings in this study were shared and disseminated to the young people and the stakeholders involved in their care and education. The forum for this was created through the virtual school for children looked after. The stakeholders were keen to hear the messages that came directly from the young people and to improve policy and practice. The messages relayed to service providers and educational settings were one of standing beside the young people and educational psychology providing the tools for this to be effective. This could be through utilising a secure holding base approach towards supporting adolescents and utilising emotional coaching skills to promote the development of this thinking.

At a service level, historically there was a multidisciplinary approach towards supporting residential settings within the Educational Psychology Service. The recent changes and shifts occurring in the educational sector with regards to working in a traded model of service delivery saw a disbanding of resources which led to an end

to this way of working. There is a need for research to keep reinforcing the value of inclusion at all levels for all young people and to move towards and recognise the importance of a shared humanity embedded in principles of compassion. The ultimate aim being for all our young people and children to feel included, cared for and to have meaningful and fulfilling future lives.

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## Appendix 1: Ethics Approval



**The  
School  
Of  
Education.**

Maryam Nazir  
c/o EdD Educational Psychology

**Head of School**  
Professor Cathy Nutbrown

School of Education  
888 Glossop Road  
Sheffield  
S10 2JA

08 March 2014

**Telephone:** +44 (0)114 222 6167  
**Email:** EdDEdPsy@sheffield.ac.uk

Dear Maryam,

### **ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER**

*The Educational experience of Young People who are looked after in local authority care in residential homes.*

Thank you for submitting your ethics application. I am writing to confirm that your application has now been approved.

We recommend you refer to the reviewers' additional comments (please see attached). You should discuss how you are going to respond to these comments with your supervisor BEFORE you proceed with your research.

This letter is evidence that your application has been approved and should be included as an Appendix in your final submission.

Good luck with your research.

Yours sincerely



Professor Dan Goodley  
**Chair of the School of Education Ethics Review Panel**

cc Dr T Williams

Enc Ethical Review Feedback Sheet(s)





7) What makes school harder?

8) On a scale of 1-10- how important are friendships in school?

0 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 10  
Not important                      somewhat important                      Really important

9) What do you find helps in your friendships?

10) What doesn't help in your friendships?

11) Do you feel people listen to you in school and what do they do that makes you feel like this?

12) Anything else that you think that I should know or that you would like to say but didn't get the chance?

Thank you so much for completing this

## Appendix 3: Information letters

### **Research Project Title: The Educational experience of Young People who are looked after in local authority care in residential homes.**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take your time in deciding whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

I am a student at Sheffield University studying Educational Psychology and I would like to find out about the school experiences of young people who are looked after and living in a children's residential home. I would like for you to share and help me understand your school experiences, so that in the future other services and professionals involved will be able to understand your needs better. I would like to interview you to hear your story and for you to feel as comfortable as possible in sharing this with me. I will not share any names, addresses, school names or any other personal details with anybody else. Once I have finished the interview with you I will write up my findings for the project. All information that you share will remain strictly confidential and all identifying information will be changed so that you cannot be recognised.

If you decide to take part I would like to interview you to ask you about your experiences. We would meet once for about an hour, at your school, (between March and April). I will ask you some questions about how you feel about school and what helps/doesn't help in school - I am interested in hearing your story. I will give you a copy of the questions beforehand if this helps. I will record our conversations, but these recordings will be deleted once the research is finished. After the interviews, I will analyse what you have said and you can ask for a copy of what I write. All the information that you provide will be confidential, this means that your real name will not be used. I will not share anything you say with your social worker or anyone else, unless you tell me something which makes me think that you or someone else is in danger. I then have a legal duty to tell your social worker about this.

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. At any time during the research you can change your mind and no longer take part. You do not have to give a reason. I am very happy to answer any questions you might have about the research and if you think you might be interested then we can arrange to meet again to talk about this project. You only have to see me on the date and time agreed and you can contact me at the university if there are any problems. Should you want to discuss any issue regarding the research with someone other than myself you can contact my Supervisor, Dr. Antony Williams, via the details listed below.

Again thank you very much for your consideration.

Please do not hesitate to contact me, if you have any further questions at:

Maryam Nazir

Bannerdale Centre

Carterknowle Road, Sheffield, S7 2EX

E-mail: [Edp05mn@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:Edp05mn@sheffield.ac.uk)

Telephone number: 0114 2506800

The University of Sheffield Supervisor: Dr. Antony Williams [antony.williams@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:antony.williams@sheffield.ac.uk). 0114 222818

## Social Worker Information Sheet

Dear .....,

I am an Educational Psychologist studying for a Doctorate in Educational Psychology. I am a working for \_\_\_\_\_ Educational Psychology Service. As part of my Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at Sheffield University, I am involved in a research project. For my research project I would like to find out about the school experiences of young people who are looked after and living in a children's residential home.

The title of the project is:

### **The Educational experience of Young People who are looked after in local authority care in residential homes.**

*(Insert name)* is being invited to take part in this research project to share their views on school experiences. Before you decide whether or not you would like *(Insert name)* to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. You can contact me on the number below. Thank you for reading this.

#### **Purpose of the project**

My hope is to develop greater insight and understanding of looked after young people's experiences in school. According to the Department for Children Schools and Families (2008) looked after children and young people are ten times more likely to be excluded from school than are their peers. My aim is to facilitate the voice of these young people and I am interested in exploring the experiences that these young people share about school. While there are no immediate benefits for those people taking part in the project, this is an opportunity for young people to talk about their experiences. It is planned that the project will be finished by May 2014.

#### **Why has *(insert name)* been chosen?**

*(Insert name)* has been chosen because *(Insert name)* is currently looked after by the local authority and is living in a children's residential home.

It is up to you to decide whether or not you give permission for *(Insert name)* to take part. If you do decide that *(Insert name)* can take part you will be given this information sheet to keep, be asked to sign a consent form.

#### **You can withdraw your consent at any time within the project; you do not have to give a reason.**

If you give your consent for *(Insert name)* to take part, I will then contact *his/ her parents (section 20)/ residential social worker* and *(Insert name)* with very similar information and asking for their consent.

#### **What does the project involve?**

I will meet with *(insert name)* to explain the project and to answer any questions *s/he* might have. I would like to interview *him/her* once to talk with them about their experiences of school. This will take approximately an hour, at a time of their choosing. There will be around 6-7 open questions and I will give a copy of these to the young person beforehand; I am interested in giving young people the opportunity to talk about their experiences. I will then analyse their responses. I would like to record our conversations using a digital voice recorder and type up what both of us have said. The audio recording will be downloaded onto my computer and then deleted from the digital recorder. These

will then only be used for analysis and no one outside of the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. Once my research is complete all recordings will be destroyed.

### **Confidentiality**

All the information that I collect during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. I will not share anything that is said with their social worker or anybody else. If they tell me something which makes me think that they or someone else is at risk of harm, then I have a duty to disclose this information.

Individuals will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. Once the research is finished, it will be submitted to the University of Sheffield. There is a possibility, that the research may be written up and submitted for publication in a professional journal. The names of the local authority, individuals and the schools will be removed.

Each young person taking part may have a copy of the thesis, which should be available by December 2014, and the main findings can be reported to them either in a short paper, or a short presentation. If for any reason the research is stopped earlier than expected, I will contact young people and explain why this is the case.

If you or the young person, would wish to make a complaint at any time, please speak first to Maryam Nazir, on 0114 2505600, and then if it is not resolved to your satisfaction, please contact my supervisor, Dr. Antony Williams on [anthony.williams@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:anthony.williams@sheffield.ac.uk). 0114 2228119. If the matter is still not resolved to your satisfaction, you can contact the University of Sheffield's Registrar and Secretary.

I also need to inform you that I have a self funded place at Sheffield University, and am also an employee of the \_\_\_\_- educational psychology service. This project has been ethically approved via the School of Education's ethics review procedure. The University's research ethics committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's ethics review procedure across the University. This project has also been ethically approved by \_\_\_\_\_City Council's ethics review procedure. If you have any questions at any time, please contact me on 0114 2505600, asking for Maryam Nazir or email me on [edp05mn@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:edp05mn@sheffield.ac.uk). You will have a copy of this information sheet and assigned consent form to keep.

If you do decide that (*insert name*) can take part, please contact me and return the enclosed consent form.

Thank you very much.

Maryam Nazir  
Educational Psychologist.

Maryam Nazir  
Bannerdale Centre  
Carterknowle Road, Sheffield, S7 2EX  
E-mail: [Edp05mn@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:Edp05mn@sheffield.ac.uk)  
Telephone number: 0114 2506800  
The University of Sheffield Supervisor: Dr. Anthony Williams [anthony.williams@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:anthony.williams@sheffield.ac.uk). 0114 22281

## Appendix 4: Consent Form

**Title of Project:**

**The Educational experience of Young People who are looked after in local authority care in residential homes.**

**Name of Researcher:**

**Maryam Nazir**

**Participant Identification Number for this project:**

**Please initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet/letter (delete as applicable) dated *[insert date]* for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. *Insert contact number here of lead researcher/member of research team (as appropriate).*
3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.
4. I agree to take part in the above research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant  
(or legal representative)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of person taking consent  
(if different from lead researcher)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

*To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Lead Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

*To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*

Copies:

*Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/pre-written script/information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy for the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the project's main record (e.g. a site file), which must be kept in a secure location.*

## Appendix 5: Interview Questions and Interview protocol

### Interviewer Guide

This is a skeletal representation of the anticipated themes/areas of interest, awaiting dynamic exploration. Dynamic expansion entailed developing a series of open-ended questions relative to each theme. These are delivered below:

#### Thematic dimension: delineation of components peculiar to the young people's situation to be explored

<b>Young People</b>	background values expectations → differences ↓ Educational experiences/background?
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#### **EXTENDED INFLUENCE**

<b>EDUCATION</b>	academic achievements Encouragement: relationships? Key adults?
------------------	---

<b>PEERS</b>	Friendships- impact/influence?
--------------	--------------------------------

<b>SYSTEMS</b>	Support/advocacy/voice?
----------------	-------------------------

<b>VOICE</b>	Views? Feelings? Situation at present?
--------------	--

<b>ADULTS IN A SUPPORT</b>	Shape of Support? Explain and relate to situation.
----------------------------	--

<b>ROLE</b>	Implication? Young people's involvement? What helps? What hinders? Outside of formal systems.
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<b>EDUCATIONAL REFORM</b>	Present situation.
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**Dissertation interview schedule for young person:**

13) Tell me about your school at present?

Probes- how are things in school?  
Is school important? Why/why not?  
Situation before- similar/any different?  
Who's important and why?

14) Tell me about your experience of school?

Probes- What helps?  
What doesn't help/  
What makes school easier?  
What makes school harder?

15) What are your views about education?

Probes- any feelings/is it important/not important/what is important?

16) Tell me about friendships in school?

Probes- Do they help-What do you find helps in your friendships?

17) If changes have been noted- are these:

- For better or worse?
- To the benefit/determent of your schooling?
- Do young people feel involved in the decision making?
- In what ways are their views heard/included?

18) What is currently working well and what is not?

Probes- specific to what is viewed as working well and how young person reports this ask to expand. Perfect school day- who would be there? What would they say? How would they help? What would they do?

19) Anything else that you think that I should know or that you would like to say but didn't get the chance?



## Appendix 6: Initial Notes

### Stage 1- Initial notes

Transcript for C	Initial notes
<p>C: My school experiences at certain schools weren't very good. I didn't get along with a lot of people. I was being bullied and just like arguments with teachers and it just went out of order.</p> <p>M: How would you describe these experiences?</p> <p>C: I wasn't being listened to and I wasn't being truthful because I was in care and my brother was in the same school as me and certain circumstances happened for him. Some of the schools I went to I got on with the teachers and got on with my work.</p> <p>M: Would you say that a was lot of the time or bit of the time?</p> <p>C: It didn't really happen a lot of the time and I didn't get on with a lot of my teachers</p> <p>M: How did that make you feel?</p> <p>C; They made me feel small like I wasn't worth it like I wasn't going to get a job when I was older.</p> <p>M; Was there anybody that did something that was different?</p> <p>C; There was my technology teacher he tried to help me, he knew I could go far and he helped me , like he gave me extra lessons and if I had a problem I could go talk to him.</p> <p>M; Was there anybody else and what did they do?</p> <p>C; There was somebody else, they helped me through it, they stuck up for me and just kept me out of trouble and they were just by my side really.</p> <p>M: Were they there a lot?</p>	<p>Personal blame- internalised others view?</p> <p>Power imbalance.</p> <p>Invisible needs and comparators- labelling. Sibling's needs.</p> <p>Need to say that not all bad-limits details.</p> <p>When probed- not main experience/memory?</p> <p>Feeling small- 'not worth it'- attributes to job- future. School as a place that is about future identity-job. 'Going far' important.</p> <p>Adult that helped- time helped. Talking to that teacher helped-being kept in mind by an adult. Teacher's awareness of Carl's situation?</p> <p>Helping adult. Standing up for his needs. Psychological proximity 'by my side'.</p>

<p>C: They were there on occasions.</p> <p>M: can I just ask you was school important to you?</p> <p>C; No not really I didn't think it was important and I didn't want to be there, <b>I used to come home all of the time and I just didn't want to be there and that was most of the time, nearly everyday.</b></p> <p>M; Was this how you felt about school in Infants and Juniors and secondary or was if different?</p> <p>C; It was different in Juniors. I loved my Juniors and Infants, I <b>loved socialising with my friends.</b></p> <p>M; What changed?</p> <p>C; I didn't like exams and moving schools and my friends didn't do well in exams and there was some of my friends who didn't got to exams and now they've <b>not got a job.</b> I knew I had to my exams <b>cus I needed to get a job.</b></p> <p>M Did you find anything helped during this time?</p> <p>C; Yes it was talking to people that helped like my teachers and people that I live with.</p> <p>M: Was that important for you and can you explain a little about why?</p> <p>C; Cus nobody likes <b>not to be listened to</b> and everybody has <b>feelings</b> and they need to let these out and need to <b>talk to somebody</b> and be listened to.</p> <p>M: Moving on to living here tell me more about your experiences here, what age were you when you came here?</p> <p>C: I was 11 and the people here really stood by me, they <b>challenged school</b> and I had an excellent</p>	<p>Maybe limited time?</p> <p>Home important- checking? Experiences in school or home or both?</p> <p>Emotive language 'loved'- happiest time for Carl. Importance of others.</p> <p>More demands- changes- feeling out of control. Again a associates school with job.</p> <p>Identity- affiliates with friends circumstances.</p> <p>Job is a need- would other Y7's be thinking of future to this extent?</p> <p>Adults helping- talking, availability of adults.</p> <p>Adults listening- making space to hear his views. Feelings, talking and being listened to.</p>
--	--

experience with people. (Pauses)...I think they could have **helped me more** in trying to keep me in school.

M: What would you change if you could?

C: I would change the head teacher at my secondary. I would him more of a **nicer person. He needed to listen to me; he was judging me on where I live and on my brother.** He wasn't listening and he was taking people's sides.

M: If you had a message for this head teacher what would it be?

C; I'll basically put it into a **nice way** just **listen** to people.... that everyone's got different personalities, **treat us fairly and listen to us.**

M: You talk of some hard time and just tell me more about some of these experiences?

C: It was my secondary, I loved the idea of going to secondary and then everything started to change. I got there and it was fine for a while, it was fine in Year 7, 8 and 9 and in year 10. I got along with people and I had not big problems and then it all went downhill. So for example, there was this one kid I had a problem with and he had a problem with me and I felt that **I wasn't being listened to and it was his side that was being taken all the time.** There was this time when this kid he was saying stuff to me and I said one thing back and he went crying to the head teacher and it was me that got excluded. I got excluded for five days and then I went back and got put into isolation and I got put into a booth all day which was **horrible, basically you were put in a small room where everybody can see you in there and you just have to stay there, all day, the next day and the next day after that.**

M: That's really hard Carl. C- yes it was. M; At any point did anybody talk to you- C; nope.

M: Then what happened?

C; I came out of isolation and got on with normal lessons and then had **another incident with same**

Adults challenging- parenting role? More help needed than available.

Power- decision maker. Not nurturing. Punitive? Whose side was being taken- other adults?

Sibling- deterministic.

Showing by example- be nice, listen- keep me in mind.

Fine for a while. Unjust- things not being fair.

Not being listened to.

Quickly excluded.

Isolation a place where others are made aware of your situation- distressing? Time slowing down.

person, same issues and then got put in isolation and same thing happened it kept going round and round.

M; At any point did anybody think about things with you?

C; There was this lady who I got on with asked what's happening, why is happening and I told her about the issues and then nought after that and I think everybody gave up on me. (goes quite).. M Is it ok to carry on? C: yes.

M; So the what happened?

C; I stayed in isolation for a while, same issues, same incidents, exclusions and it just kept going on and one day I had an issue and teacher called me in and I wanted to have a word about the lies and the teacher wouldn't let me out and I tried to get out of the door and as he tried to close the door I pulled it and his hand got in the way and... and that's when he expelled me.

M; What were you feelings around this?

C; I was angry and then I got given the opportunity to go to another school and this was my other secondary. I loved it at first and it was good with good atmosphere with good staff but then I started to get into incidents and got excluded a couple of times and then I didn't go into lessons or do my exams. I was on the corridors having arguments with senior members of staff and then they kicked me out and moved me into the inclusion unit.

M: Was that within the school or out of school?

C: It was the school's inclusion unit and things were good there and I really enjoyed it. I got 1;1 support and I started to go to my exams and did my work and qualified (laughs).

M: What changed at that point?

C: I think I just knew to get my head down and do my work!

Nobody there when needed.

Repeat of experience.

Adults giving up. Needed more persistent checking- short term support.

Feeling unheard and repeat of experience and things not changing led to bigger incident.

Exclusion- lies- others interpretation.

Carrying anger to the new school. Repeat of incidents- physically and emotionally opts out. Arguments as a way of being held in mind- expressing anger.

Containment- physical and emotional.

Enjoyment, fulfilment and achievement.

M: Ok thank you and looking back what would you want to say to the teachers and people in school?

C; It would be basically to give more support to people, cus of **us being looked after, people seem to judge us as being bad as being naughty as in we're not very good and that our parents obviously didn't want us....** And that's not true we all have feelings and we are human beings and we should be treated like human beings. It doesn't matter where you live you could be living here. Living on the streets **and you should be treated fairly!**

Thank you and you mentioned that people judge you, what makes you feel this way?

C; basically they treat you differently like this time **when someone was allowed to go on the computer but I couldn't.** There's also when you go out as a group like you also get dirty looks when you go out from people....Cus **I'm a member of the care council and I do a lot of work like changes to help people improve people's lives when they're in care.**

M; What doesn't help?

C; Treat us like **human beings**, you don't need to know all our backgrounds, you don't need to know we're just **human beings** who want to get on with our live. If I want people to know then I'll tell them.

M; What else makes things easier for you ?

C; **I'm a kinesthetic learner** and I like to do stuff and when I was in the inclusion then I was more active, I was more happy and I was just getting on with my work and it was **mostly 1;1 support and most people like 1;1 support.**

M; What makes it harder?

C; When adults don't believe you (shuts door due to vacuum cleaner noise). **Basically as I said previously I was talking to that boy who I didn't get along and it got worse and he started to be abusive he attacked**

Feeling valued led to achieving.

Judgement by adults- others viewing Carl as 'bad' and that his situation is 'his doing' .

Big issues/questions around stigma- social justice. Fairness and being human. Insightful more so than adults that were paid to be in his life.

Examples that are relevant to his experience. Puts forward status as a member of care council- pride and self esteem.

Being human and fair treatment. Don't judge from limited info- others knowing about your life.

me first and then I responded but then it was only me that got excluded which was unfair. It felt like I was telling the truth and that I was lying and that's one thing I can't stand, being called a liar.. I don't like it.

M: What matters to you in terms of your schooling?

Basically that I get all the qualifications that I need to get a job... M that is important and is your focus.

What isn't important?

Teachers (Laughs), M; all teachers: C: Senior! M; Ok tell me more like about TA's C; They're helpful, Describe what they do?

C; Support you basically and give you 1;1 support and make you feel happy and make you get on with your work, some anyway. They can actually talk to young people not like you're a child more like you're an adult.

M: What about the senior staff:

C: Don't like... form my past experience they don't believe me and always taking on other people's sides and I just gave up on them. There was one that listened to me in my second secondary school and I could work in their room and I just got along with them.

M: Did they talk to anybody here in your home?

C; Yeah they were mostly joined up and there were a couple of people that separated and talked about me I bet! I was part of most of the discussions and some of them I wasn't.

M: Would you have wanted more involvement?

C; Yes I would want more.

Thank you and the next bit I want us to think about is friendships, describe what they mean to you.

C: I'm not into young person friendships and I'm more tend to hang around with adults and older people.

Aware what suited learning style- adults supporting. Being active leading to feeling happy.

Standing up to others- being believed- being heard. Bullying from others. Resisting being bullied- abusive interaction.

Fairness- being excluded. Not being believed by adults and peers.

Aspirational- need a job and school will lead to that. Job will lead to independence and freedom.

Power- senior people in school decision makers and poor decisions made on his behalf.

TA's more containing/nurturing.

Talking to you- being heard by them

Fairness- giving on them as they did Carl. Safety, Containment. But had to get into trouble first before that was offered.

M; Did you ever like having a peer group?

C; Not really **no I was never my own peer group person and I liked people older than me.**

M; What about now?

C; It's **still adults and I would've kept it the same.**

M; Lastly if I was to ask you of everything that's happened did you feel involved in your education.

C; Most of it and some teachers and people I live with helped. M; Did you feel heard? C: Some I was and some I wasn't.

Think back and have I missed asking you anything and you wish I has asked?

C; No I don't think so.

M; Did you feel understood?

C: No I don't think so as **I'm one of these people that keep it in.** M; Would you have liked this? Yes I would have and it wouldn't bother me and **I wouldn't blurt it out to anyone.**

M; Anything that I've missed:

C; No I don't think so and it was good.

Being part of the discussions between adults.

Being part of decision making.  
Forming friendships.

Adults more important- being closer to adults in school.

Continues viewing adult relationships as important.  
Power and trust?

Interestingly despite wanting to talk and discussing support and being listed to it was also hard to share his experiences.

