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Beyond Attachment and Trauma: Adoptive Parents' Experiences of their Child's Education

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**Research thesis submitted in part requirement for the Doctor
of Educational and Child Psychology**

Department of Educational Studies

June 2019

Abstract

From a social constructionist perspective and that of an insider researcher, I have adopted a narrative approach that seeks to explore the stories adoptive parents tell of their child's education. Children adopted from care have often experienced significant abuse, neglect, loss and separation. It is not widely understood how early life adversity and experiences of adoption interplay with education in the UK. Despite, the research on parent views and voice in education, the views of adoptive parents' experiences of their children's education is lacking in the research literature.

Semi-structured interviews were utilised to facilitate the telling of three distinct stories. All three parents had experience of their child attending a mainstream school. However, while one family was continuing to access mainstream education, the second family was accessing specialist residential school and the third was home schooling. The co-constructed narratives were subject to a thematic analysis. Individual themes are presented. However, there was clearly a level of relatedness that resulted in common themes amongst the participants: Expectations, Knowing and understanding and Support. The need for knowledgeable and understanding professionals who display honesty and purpose in their communication was seen as important. Furthermore, it was considered important that professionals become aware of the impact of their expectations on adoptive parents and their children. It was found that these professionals should show empathy and understanding of individual circumstances. Participants wanted professionals to take control by

leading communication and provision in order to reduce the pressure for adoptive parents to take control of their own child's education.

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Chapter One: Introduction

I am approaching this inquiry as an adoptive parent and a trainee educational psychologist (TEP). I have personal experience within the world of adoption, but it was while on placement as a TEP that my attention was drawn to this area and my interest in exploring what adoption means in the context of school was ignited. On starting my placement in a North West local authority, I soon realised that as a service we were receiving a number of requests for involvement with adopted children and their families. At that time, I was also hearing a number of comments from Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) and educational psychologists about the impact of attachment difficulties on individual adopted children: 'they've obviously got attachment difficulties [or disorder] because they're adopted'. This made wonder what their understanding of adoption was and whether the needs of adopted children were sufficiently explained using the theory of attachment. Reflecting on my own experience as an adoptive parent, I felt concerned that assumptions and generalisations were made of adopted children.

Alongside this experience, I was having difficulties in being heard and understood when communicating with my son's schoolteacher. This made me reflect on what it was I wanted them to understand about my son and our situation. I wondered whether school staff would benefit from knowing more about adoption than just attachment theory. Recognising that my knowledge was limited to my own situation I decided that it would be helpful to know more about other adopted children and their families and what they wanted schools to know about their situations. From the perspective of parents as experts, understanding other adoptive parents'

experiences is vital in contributing to a greater understanding of their situation and that of their children. I believe it is important to understand the experiences of others, how they make sense of these experiences and the meanings attached. I attempt to do this through my work as a TEP; amplifying the voices of others to be heard and understood.

I do not wish to add to a narrative that calculates and restricts the future for children and young people. In my work, I am conscious not to put a ceiling on the potential of children and young people preferring to open up possibilities for development and change. While it is helpful to understand the potential impact of different experiences and patterns of expression, each situation, family and child is unique with experiences of distress being inseparable from social and cultural contexts. While I acknowledge the role of diagnosis in western culture in accessing resources, treatment and services, I believe there is an increasing tendency towards pathologising childhood experiences. With the increasing influence of health services within education, there is a risk that the language within schools in relation to childhood experiences and expressions becomes increasingly medicalised and within child focused. Through my work as a TEP, I often hear teachers wondering if a child will ever be able to 'do' as they have a diagnosis of foetal alcohol syndrome or attachment difficulties or ADHD. Monkman (2017) highlights a need for policy makers to ensure that the language introduced into schools in relation to mental health does not disempower teachers in their support of children and young people. She suggested that overly psychiatric language might disengage teachers from their responsibility to support. Johnstone and Boyle (2018) suggest that an alternative

approach to this, is to see behaviours and patterns of expression as coping and survival mechanisms rather than pathological ills requiring diagnosis and ‘treatment’. It is with this in mind that I approach this inquiry.

1:1 Definition of Terms

The table below highlights key terms used within the literature review.

Table 1:1 Key Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Children Adopted from Care	<i>“Children who were looked after by an English or Welsh local authority immediately before being adopted.” (EFA, 2016)</i>
Adopted Children	<p><i>“An adopted child has been legally taken by another family to be taken care of as their own child.” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.)</i> This may follow a range of circumstances:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A child in the care of the local authority • A child living overseas (Intercountry Adoption) • Fostering for Adoption (no additional move to different adoptive parents) • Concurrent planning (placed with prospective adoptive parents rather than foster parents while decisions are made about the child’s future placement) • A child that has been relinquished by their birth parents (very rare). <p>N.B. Special guardianship is not classed as adoption as parental responsibility is shared with birth parents.</p>
Looked After Children/ Children in Care	<p><i>“A child who has been in the care of their local authority for more than 24 hours. Looked after children are also often referred to as children in care, a term which many children and young people prefer.” (NSPCC, 2018)</i></p> <p>Children in care are generally living with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • foster parents • residential children's homes • residential settings like schools or secure units. • Semi-independent living arrangements • Placed with parents
Attachment	<i>“. . . strongly disposed to seek proximity to and contact with a specific figure and to do so in certain situations, notably when . . . frightened, tired or ill” (Bowlby, 1982, p.371).</i>
Internal Working Model (IWM)	<i>“A cognitive framework comprising mental representations for understanding the world, self, and others. A person’s interaction with others is guided by memories and</i>

	<p><i>expectations from their internal model which influence and help evaluate their contact with others” (Bretherton, & Munholland, 1999).</i></p> <p>The IWM contributes to the perception of others being trustworthy, the self as valuable and effectiveness when interacting with others.</p>
Trauma	<p><i>“Psychological trauma is the unique individual experience of an event or of enduring conditions in which the individual’s ability to integrate his or her emotional experience is overwhelmed (ie his or her ability to stay present, understand what is happening, integrate the feelings, and make sense of the experience), or the individual experiences (subjectively) a threat to life, bodily integrity, or sanity.” (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995, p. 60)</i></p>
Adverse Childhood Experiences	<p><i>“child maltreatment (e.g. physical, sexual and verbal abuse) and broader experiences of household dysfunction, such as witnessing violence in the home, parental separation and growing up in a household affected by substance misuse, mental illness or criminal behaviour.” (Hughes et al, 2016 p.222)</i></p>

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Adoption is a legal process by which children who cannot live with their birth parents come to permanently live with a new family receiving the same rights as if they were born into that family. Adoption has been found to have significant benefits; positively impacting on the progress and development of children who cannot return to their birth families (Palacios and Brodzinsky, 2010; Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2013; Crowley, 2019). Van IJzendoorn and Juffer (2006) found improvements in growth, attachment security and cognitive ability when compared to those children who remain in care. However, for some children distress from their early life experiences is not ameliorated by the permanence and security that adoption can offer (Meakings et al, 2018). This can result in a challenging adoption journey for some families as they face difficulties managing complex behaviours, attachment and relationship needs and poor emotional regulation (Selwyn et al, 2015). While adoption disruption rates are low at around 3% (Selwyn et al, 2015), it is now understood that a number of adoptive families will either need ongoing support or will need to seek support at different points during their adoption journey (Meakings et al, 2018). Hanna et al (2017) reflect this through the concept 'love is not enough'. However, their focus is on a particular group of adoptive families in America whose children have a diagnosed mental health condition. This is not representative of the population of adopted children. As with many relational situations and experiences, there is a more complex picture of personal experience, understanding and response to both environment and others within that environment. There is no simple linear cause and effect when it comes to human experience and relationships. Therefore, research that can develop an

understanding of the best way to support adoptive families is vital for the development of appropriate intervention, practice and provision (Stateva and Stock, 2013).

2:1 A Brief History of Adoption in the UK

A government review of adoption legislation in 1989 was the first official recognition of the changing nature and role of adoption within the UK (Parker, 1999). With increasing numbers of children being taken into the care of the State due to abuse and neglect, it was recognised that the purpose of adoption was more about providing a family for children who could no longer return home. The idea that adoption served the purpose of providing homes for relinquished babies was no longer viable. Today, adoption is 'concerned with providing secure, permanent relationships for some of society's most vulnerable children.' (PIU, 2000, p.5).

There have been a number of key changes in adoption legislation. The Adoption and Children's Act 2002 prompted a major reform programme in adoption, which included national training for social care workers. This focused on 'planning for permanence' for looked after children and recognised the life-long impact of adoption (Meakings et al, 2018). More recently, campaigning and research from adoption services, charities and voluntary organisations (Thomas, 2013) has increased the profile of adopted children and led to improved policy and provision. Government legislation and initiatives (DfE, 2012; Thomas, 2015), have acknowledged the pre-care experiences and continuing needs of children adopted from care with the introduction of pupil premium funding for adopted children. This

demonstrates the government's acknowledgement of the impact of trauma and loss experienced by children adopted from care on their learning and development (Thomas, 2015). In addition to this, the introduction of the Adoption Support Fund was realised across England enabling local authorities to access to therapeutic services to meet the mental health needs of children adopted from care (Stock, Spielhofer and Gieve, 2016). The DfE (2018b) also revised the role of the Virtual School Head Teacher incorporating responsibility for providing advice and signposting in relation to previously looked-after children. This amendment was designed to improve the availability of support required for previously looked-after children to achieve their potential. Alongside looked after children, young carers and children with SEND, adopted children are now recognised as a vulnerable group (DoH/DfE, 2017) at risk of poor developmental outcomes (Norman et al, 2012).

2:2 Current Situation

In 2017, 4350 children were adopted from care in England (DfE, 2018a) with 740 being adopted in the North West of England. Although the number of children adopted from care decreased by 8% in 2017, this was expected as there has been a decline in the number of children in care with a placement order since 2015. This downward trend has continued following a peak of 5360 in 2015.

The number of male and female children adopted from care in 2017 was not significantly different to previous years with 51% being male and 49% being female. Trends in relation to ethnic origin of children adopted from care has also remained

stable over recent year with 84% being of white origin, 11% mixed, 2% black or black British origin and 3% from other ethnic groups.

Furthermore, 71% of children adopted from care were aged between 1 and 4 years, 21% were aged between 5 and 9 years, 7% were under 1 year while those aged 10 years and over represent 1% of the 4350 children adopted from care in 2017. This gives an average age of 3 years and 4 months at the point of adoption (DfE, 2018a). Therefore, the majority of children placed for adoption have their full educational career ahead of them.

The department for education (DfE, 2018a) report on the proportions of looked after children by category of need. The majority of children taken into care during the year 2016/17 was as a result of abuse or neglect (62%) and family dysfunction (15%). For an adoption order to be granted, there needs to be significant and clear evidence that a child's birth family does not have the capacity to keep the child safe and is likely to cause further harm if they are returned. The wider family are assessed to ascertain their capacity to care for and meet the needs of the child. It is only when these options have been exhausted that adoption is considered. Therefore, where it is decided that a child or children are to be adopted, they will have experienced or be at risk of such significant harm that it is deemed in their best interests for all direct contact with their birth family to cease. However, Biehal et al (2010) explain that this decision is not straightforward but rather it is the result of combination of complex processes involving;

'political, legal, institutional and individual decisions. . . shaped by policies, organisational cultures, local decisions about resources and local courts, as well as by individual professionals and the wishes, feelings and behaviour of children, carers and birth parents.' (Biehal et al, 2010 p.115)

2:3 Adoption Research

When conducting the literature search, the search engines, PsychInfo, Starplus (Sheffield University Library) and Google Scholar were utilised. The following search terms were used; 'adoption' plus 'education' or 'school'; 'adoptive parents' plus 'education' or 'school'; 'parent views' plus 'education' or 'school'; 'parent experiences' plus 'education' or 'school'; 'adopted children' plus 'outcomes'; 'adverse childhood experiences'; 'attachment'; 'adoption' plus 'attachment'. In addition to this, the White Rose eTheses website was searched for theses related to adoption. Furthermore, relevant references cited in the journal articles found during the search strategy above were collected.

Over the last 25 years, research into adoption has significantly grown. Hamilton et al (2017) used a systematic review of peer-reviewed English-language journals using a number of search databases to better understand the nature of adoption research. They found that adoption research is wide ranging, falling under the disciplines of psychology, social work, medicine, neuroscience and nursing with knowledge being shared across disciplinary boundaries. However, Brown et al (2017) found that much of the adoption literature is based on US samples and noted that European literature pays limited attention to the education of children adopted from care.

Children adopted from care have a range of needs that can vary from one child to another (Hare and Bullock, 2006; Cooper and Johnson, 2007; Osborne and Alfano, 2011). Although the majority of children adopted from care have experienced some form of abuse, neglect and/ or family dysfunction, the experiences and the resulting impact will differ from one child to the next. Trauma is subjective and very much depends on when and how an individual perceives, experiences and processes stressful or distressing events. The contexts, circumstances and relationships interwoven within a person's life will also contribute to the lasting impact of particular experiences. Therefore, a particularly distressing event may be traumatic to one person but not another. Given the nature of Educational Psychology work, the adopted children who become known to the Educational Psychology Service will have needs that are significantly affecting their educational attainment and progress. Therefore, the remaining review of literature will address research that focuses on those adopted children for whom their early life experiences continue to impact on their development and wellbeing. However, it is important to emphasise that this will not be the experience of all children adopted from care.

2:4 The Early Life experiences of Children Adopted from Care

Thomas (2015) recognises that 'the children who cannot return home are those looked after children most likely to have experienced trauma and loss' (p.13). The National Children's Bureau (n.d.) states that children adopted from care have often experienced emotional and physical neglect, physical and/ or sexual abuse, poor parenting, family breakdown and most significantly separation from their main caregiver. Research on the impact of the experiences of looked after children also

identifies the effects of prenatal trauma such as exposure to drugs, alcohol and domestic abuse (Sunderland, 2008). Consequently, some babies are taken into care at birth, often following a stay in hospital to address medical needs because of prenatal and neonatal abuse.

Children adopted from care wait on average two years three months from entering the care system to receiving an adoption order (Langton, 2017) and therefore are more likely to have experienced several changes of homes and school (Syne et al, 2012), increasing their experience of stressful, confusing and unsettling separations. Selwyn et al (2014) used a mixed methods approach with a national survey of local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies to establish the rate of adoption disruption within the United Kingdom (UK). The study found that only 0.3% of adopted children had experienced one stable care placement prior to being adopted. Therefore, children adopted from care will have experienced significant loss and separation and for most, on more than one occasion. While some young children and babies may not remember this separation and loss, it will be with them as they grow and learn about their life story.

All of these experiences can be traumatic and depending on the degree, resiliency factors and individual sense making, these experiences may or may not result in lasting psychological trauma. For some adopted children, their early life experiences are significantly traumatising (Hughes and Braylin, 2012) with early life adversity affecting relationship formation (Cooper and Johnson, 2007), executive functioning (Fry et al, 2017), development, emotional regulation (Dvir, et al., 2014) and

educational achievement. Meakings et al (2018) note that many children adopted from care will have a *'diverse range of physical, psychological and social needs that require long-term support and a therapeutic approach to parenting'* (p. 59).

The significant loss and separation that many children adopted from care experience, can affect the formation of attachment between a child and their adoptive parents as well as subsequent relationships (Stateva and Stock, 2013). Abuse, neglect, family dysfunction and parental mental illness can also affect the formation of meaningful relationships.

2:5 Attachment theory

Attachment is a fundamental theory in understanding the experiences, development and outcomes for children adopted from care. Bowlby (1958) introduced attachment theory to make sense of the mother-child relationship and the impact on a child's development. He defined attachment as being *" . . . strongly disposed to seek proximity to and contact with a specific figure and to do so in certain situations, notably when . . . frightened, tired or ill"* (Bowlby, 1982, p.371).

Ainsworth et al (1978) created the Strange Situation for assessing young children's attachments to their caregiver. Observations of the child's responses to their caregiver following a period of separation were noted and classified under three different types of attachment categories: insecure-avoidance, insecure-resistant and insecure-disorganised (Mein, 2017). These categories are allocated based on a child's response to a stressful situation (Van Den Dries et al, 2009). Children who

are assessed as having a secure attachment perceive themselves as worthy of love and are comforted through contact with their caregiver when upset. Children who are assessed as having an insecure attachment can avoid contact, seeing their caregiver as emotional unavailable or can resist contact when their caregiver is inconsistently available. If a child presents with a disorganised attachment to their caregiver, they will be inconsistent in their responses and will see their caregiver as frightening and unpredictable (Barone et al, 2017). However, the focus of attachment is usually on the relationship with the main caregiver and does not consider how additional attachments contribute towards a child's development (Mein, 2017).

Today there is a greater emphasis by wider society on the importance of attachment in the early years of a child's life. This everyday understanding of attachment relates to the relationship between a child and their caregiver rather than a category of a child's response to stressful situation (Woolgar and Scott, 2014). Additionally, the clinical understanding of attachment is in relation to diagnostic criteria for Reactive Attachment Disorder and Disinhibited Attachment Disorder presented in the ICD-10 and the DSM-5 manuals. However, the prevalence of attachment disorders is rare (Ford et al, 2007; Woolgar and Scott, 2014). With its development and adaptation, the theory, diagnosis and everyday reference to attachment has come to mean very different things. In particular, Mein (2017) highlights a common misunderstanding of insecure attachment as meaning a lack of attachment, thus vilifying this category. She suggests that having an insecure attachment is common with at least 39% of us being insecurely attached. However, it is not clear where this figure has come from.

Furthermore, the terms attachment difficulties and attachment disorder have been found to be used interchangeably, often not reflecting the diagnostic definitions (Woolgar and Scott, 2014). This has resulted in misunderstanding and misapplication of attachment theory in understanding the experiences of children adopted from care (Woolgar and Scott, 2014).

Bowlby (1969) proposed the idea of an Internal Working Model (IWM) of attachment that develops through the interaction between a child and their caregiver. The IWM is a representation of self in relation to others, determines understanding of relationships and is central to later development and functioning (Pace and Zavattini, 2010).

Barone et al (2017) used an Italian cohort to investigate how adoptive parents foster children's social and emotional adjustment. Shortly after adoption, parental mental representations of attachment were measured and then at one year and two years, children's attachment and social-emotional adjustment data was collected. They used well validated measurement tools such as semi-structured interviews or questionnaires. The sample included 48 adopted children within their pre-school years with ages ranging from 3 to 5 years and their adoptive parents were recruited to the study.

After being adopted for a year, they found that 31% of the children were securely attached, 42% were recorded with a disorganised attachment and 27% insecure attachment. The authors noted that parents' secure attachment was related to an increased probability that their children would present with a more secure

attachment pattern. At two years post adoption, those children who were assessed as having a secure attachment presented with greater social-emotional adjustment than those children with insecure and disorganised attachments. However, there are limitations to the research. The first being the context and cohort of the study. The differences in the adoption systems between the UK and Italy prevents contextualisation to the UK population who consequently may have additional or different variables affecting attachments. The authors are clear that repeated measurements would have been a better technique than consecutive evaluations and may have provided information about the development of attachments and social-emotional adjustment over time.

Pace and Zavattini (2010) examined the attachment patterns of late-adopted (After the age of one) children who were aged between 4 and 7 years and their adoptive mothers within the initial 7-8 months period post adoption. Data was collected from mother-child observational sessions in a video recording laboratory in the University of Rome. Twenty adopted children and their mothers and twelve birth children and their mothers were assessed at two different time-points using the Separation-Reunion Procedure, the Manchester Child Attachment Story Task and the Adult Attachment Interview.

They found that the attachment security of late-adopted children developed over time. In addition to this, the children of adoptive mothers who were assessed as having a secure mental representation of attachment showed significant changes from an insecure attachment to a secure attachment. However, there was no

significant relationship between maternal attachment and adopted children's behaviours. The authors concluded that changes in attachment patterns is possible but is a gradual process that is more likely to occur when adoptive mothers are assessed as having a secure attachment mental representation. However, this focus on attachment to mothers does not consider the role of attachment to fathers and other significant people in a child's life. Additionally, this study, was again, performed outside of the UK, which diminishes the generalisability to different systems and practise. The sample size is also small and only relevant to a small subgroup of adopted children and their mothers. In addition, the measurement procedure can be considered clinical and artificial given no data was collected in an environment, which may place the participants at more ease. The rather short follow-up period was sufficient to generate statistically significant data but insufficient to measure a more long-term pattern of attachment which may demonstrate disruption or instability.

Barone and Lionetti (2011) considered the role of attachment in the development of emotional understanding in adopted children. They assessed 20 sets of adoptive parents' attachment using the Adult Attachment Interview and then assessed their adopted children's attachment 12 months later using the Manchester Child Attachment Story Task. They found that children coming into adoptive families bring with them specific IWMs formed through their previous relationships. In addition to this, adoptive parents with a secure mental representation were shown to be a protective factor in the development of a disorganised attachment. Furthermore, there was a statistically significant relationship between children's

security of attachment and performance relating to emotional understanding. This suggests that new attachments with adoptive parents can help revise their early IWMs (Pace and Zavattini, 2010). Barone and Lionetti (2011) conclude that adoption can support the emotional development of adopted children's contributing to the partially amelioration of prior traumatic experiences. However, Barone et al (2017) note that despite this, the emotional development of adopted children was behind their non-adopted peers (van den Dries et al, 2009). For those children who have experienced trauma, their IWM may be such that they will require more resources from their adoptive parents in order that they are able to overcome their experiences and revise their IWM (Barone and Lionetti, 2011). This is particularly pertinent to late-adopted children who may present with emotional distress that severely challenges the formation of a secure attachment with their adoptive parents (Pace and Zavattini, 2010).

The Barone and Lionetti (2011) study shares many limitations of those mentioned earlier with respect to different systems and practises in different countries together with generalisability outside of the studied population. This study also had a remarkably unequal weighting of gender in the study population with 16 being male and only 4 female. Additionally, statistical analysis performed on such small numbers is likely prone to significant error and so was therefore not performed for a number of the measures.

Woolgar and Scott (2014) presented several case studies demonstrating the problems that can occur when adoptive children are assumed to have an

attachment disorder. They found that when this happened, there was no consideration of the circumstances, history and presentation of the children. Woolgar and Scott perceive this to be a common occurrence where professionals too often understand the needs of adopted children through the lens of a generic attachment disorder. Bell (2012) proposes a model of attachment that focuses on the dynamics of attachment through measuring the level of trust (strength) in a relationship. This model may be more appropriate for understanding the development of the attachment relationship between a child adopted from care and their adoptive parents. Bell (2012) envisions a focus on the changes in attachment strength as the relationship develops. Furthermore, he recommends a consideration of the caregiving that a parent provides as he sees this preceding the development of the attachment system. Caregiving is a motivation to respond to the full range of a child's needs. However, this can be challenging if a child adopted from care is presenting with extreme emotional distress and responding in contradictory ways to their parents' caregiving.

Attachment theory is a central psychological theory in understanding the experiences of adopted children. However, the everyday use of attachment theory to support adoptive families can be fraught with difficulties, particularly in when its use can limit awareness to the wider context and consideration of other factors in relation to adoption. Additionally, there appears to be variability in understanding and use of attachment categories. Furthermore, labelling a child with attachment difficulties can suggest a difficulty within the child that permeates all their relationships. This has the potential to reduce opportunity for development and

growth over time and does not reflect the relational context of attachment theory (Slater, 2007). In addition to this, there is a lack of consideration of different attachment relationships with different people and the impact of this.

The research sighted in this literature review highlights links between adoptive parents' mental representations of attachments and their children's attachments. Where parents have secure mental representation of attachment, their children showed changes to their IWM over time. However, the methodologies adopted in these studies used standardised tools that provide a broad representation of attachment but offer little insight into the experiences of attachment in adoption. While these findings are valuable in highlighting the role of attachment and potential for changes in attachment categories for adopted children and their families, the research has been conducted in Italy and involves intercountry adoptions and children adopted from institutions. This cohort is not representative of the children adopted from care in the UK.

From an insider researcher perspective, there seems to be gap in the research literature about the formation of attachments between adoptive parents and their children and their experiences of this. Bell (2012) makes some efforts to consider how attachments are formed between adoptive parents and their children by highlighting the role of caregiving in the development of attachments. Responding appropriately to the needs of adopted children is a precursor to the development of an attachment (Bell, 2012). However, given the experiences and emotional distress

of some children adopted from care, caregiving can be a complex and emotionally demanding process.

Attachment theory is fundamental to adoption but it is not the only lens through which adoption should be viewed. The theory focuses on a significant aspect of adoption but does not offer a comprehensive understanding of adoption.

With a greater recognition of the needs of children adopted from care there is a growing acknowledgement of the challenges adoptive parents face (Cooper and Johnson, 2007). However, this is not always acknowledged by the professionals adoptive parents encounter, particularly school staff (Langton, 2017). Selwyn et al (2014) found that a third of adoptive families experience some difficulties and approximately a quarter have major challenges. In addition, 10% of the families had experienced adoption breakdown with the child leaving home. They observed that where disruption did not occur, it was due to 'the commitment and tenacity of adoptive parents' rather than an absence of difficulties. Thomas (2013) explains that the parenting skills required to raise an adopted child need to be adapted for the trauma and loss they have likely experienced.

2:6 Mental Health

The mental health of children and young people is at the forefront of the Government's agenda and is a key focus in a number of national policies (DoH, 2014; DoH, 2015; DoH/DfE, 2017; Public Health England, 2016; DfE, 2016). Reports from the UK suggest that the onset of 50% of all adult mental health difficulties is before

the age of fourteen (Mental Health Taskforce, 2016) with one in eight children meeting the criteria for a mental health disorder (National Centre for Social Research, 2017). This has increased slightly since a previous survey of the mental health of children and young people in Great Britain (Green et al, 2004). However, this may reflect the increase in profile and awareness of mental health, changes in help seeking behaviour and diagnostic criteria.

It is suggested that mental health needs are much more prevalent among looked after children (Hughes et al, 2017). Meltzer et al (2003) in their study investigating mental health of children in the UK, suggested that 45% of looked after children have a diagnosable mental health disorder (compared to 10% of all children): 37% had a conduct disorder, 12% an emotional disorder and 7% a hyperkinetic disorder. However, this information is based on data collected on 355 young people; a very small percentage of all looked after children in Scotland at the time. Additionally, the authors were looking for the prevalence of mental health disorders from the data collected rather than the young people already having a diagnosis. As the authors were looking at the data from the perspective of diagnostic criteria, this does not consider alternative ways of viewing the difficulties making a diagnosis more likely.

However, this does not detract from the adverse experiences of looked after children and similarly those children adopted from care. Their experiences will make them more vulnerable to developing mental health difficulties than those children who have not had involvement from social care (Mental Health Taskforce,

2016). Although children adopted from care will have similar mental health and behavioural difficulties as looked after children, there is limited evidence on the incidence of mental health problems in children adopted from care (DoH/DfE, 2017).

Brown et al (2019) looked at the differences in internalising and externalising behaviours between children adopted from care and non-adopted children. Previous research studies had produced mixed results with some suggesting that adopted children have particular difficulties with externalising problems (Brodzinsky et al, 1998). However, a recent meta-analysis found that adopted children have greater difficulties in terms of total externalising and internalising behaviours when compared with non- adopted peers (Wiley, 2017). Brown et al (2019) collected data through the distribution of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to 10-15 year olds found that adopted children reported higher levels of externalising symptoms than their non-adopted peers. While, both groups scored similarly for internalising symptoms. Brown et al (2019) reflected on the limitations of the SDQ for measuring trauma and attachment related difficulties and looked to this as one reason for the similarities in internalising symptoms. However, looking at the methodology of the study; the sample size, the lack of consideration of early adversity and the lack of clarity around the definition of adoption, there is some challenge with relying on this data. This reflects a similar disparity between other studies of a similar nature highlighting difficulties in achieving a comprehensive picture of mental health and wellbeing of children adopted from care.

There has been a greater emphasis within policies for improving mental health provision for children and young people by building stronger links between Education and Health. However, this promotion can be seen to emphasise a medical, diagnostic approach to mental health (Mills, 2017). While social, economic and environmental factors are recognised as correlating with mental health disorders, there is still a push to get children and young people identified, assessed and diagnosed. Mills (2017), highlights the limitations of diagnostic checklists in acknowledging the circumstances and experiences that may contribute to a child's presenting behaviours. The use of a within-child diagnostic approach is suggested to reduce teacher efficacy making staff feel powerless to meet the needs of children who are perceived to require specialist intervention (Monkman, 2017).

Given the experiences of many children adopted from care, it can be argued that any resulting psychological and emotional distress is an understandable response to their circumstances. Johnstone and Boyle (2018), propose '*a structure for identifying patterns in emotional distress, unusual experiences and troubling behaviour, as an alternative to psychiatric diagnosis and classification*' (p. 5). This framework adopts a multi-theoretical approach to distress and personal meaning. They reject the idea of applying diagnostic labels based on unfounded biological assumptions in understanding experiences of psychological and emotional distress. Instead, they advocate for an understanding of emotional distress through a recognition of personal meaning, cultural, social and relational circumstances. Johnstone and Boyle also recognise the difficulty in adopting such an approach when diagnosis, causality and the medical model is embedded within western culture and

philosophical assumptions. For example, for some children adopted from care their needs are so great that adoptive families require the support of education, health and social care professionals and a diagnosis can often get access to the provision and support that the child and family needs. Additionally, a diagnosis can also give recognition, reason and understanding of the often, long-term difficulties some families face. When faced with a lack of understanding and empathy from others, parents can often feel blamed for their child's behaviour. A diagnosis can provide understanding, reassurance and evidence that they are not the cause of their child's difficulties.

Recently, studies have attempted to highlight the links between mental ill health and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). ACEs include abuse, neglect and household dysfunction, all which are reasons for children to be placed into care. Evidence suggests that ACEs impact negatively on a child's future mental health and wellbeing (DoH/DfE, 2017). Research in the UK has developed from original research conducted in America in the 1990s by Kaiser Permanente. The study collected data from surveys completed by college-educated people about their childhood experiences and current situation and was later repeated in the UK (Bellis et al, 2014; 2015). The greater the number of ACEs the greater risk of lifelong difficulties in risk taking behaviours, health and social outcomes. Bellis et al (2014) found that the prevalence of ACEs to be high with half of the general population reporting at least one ACE (Bellis et al, 2015). Furthermore, 8% of people reported 4 or more ACEs which was suggested to significantly increase their risk of cancer, heart disease, mental illness and health risk behaviours (Boullier and Blair, 2018).

The research brings about an increase in understanding and consideration of social and relational experiences. However, it does so in a fatalistic approach in an attempt to compartmentalise and quantify human experience. Research and attention to ACEs has been born out of a public health concern and the demands and costs placed on health services. Therefore, there is a particular motivation and lens through which childhood experiences and adult outcomes are being measured. While the research is robust and far-reaching, it relies on individual self-reports of historical events. It could be that adults who are suffering from chronic disease, mental illness and risky behaviours may have a skewed perception of their childhood, increasing the incidence of reporting ACEs. Additionally, the research does not provide an explanation for those people who experience a high number of ACEs yet do not succumb to poor health outcomes.

2:7 Educational Outcomes for Children Adopted from Care.

Brown et al (2019) recognise that early life experience has an effect on development and progress in academic attainment, behaviour and relationships at school. They identify hypervigilance, defiance, aggression, controlling behaviour, poor organisational skills, attention and empathy and difficulties forming and maintaining friendships as some of the challenges that children who are adopted from care may face (Phillips, 2007). However, a meta-analysis using data from 62 studies and an overall sample of 17767 children across America, Europe and Australasia discovered that adopted children performed equally as well as peers on measures of IQ but less well in terms of school performance and language development (Van Ijzendoorn and Juffer, 2006; Juffer and Van Ijzendoorn, 2005; 2007). This data suggests that

particular factors are preventing the transference of IQ ability to performance in school. Brown et al (2019) suggest that understanding the interplay between the social context of school and cognitive ability is important when thinking about this barrier. However, the data collected from the meta-analysis included very few studies from the UK. This will have a bearing on how representative the findings are to those children adopted from care in the UK. In particular, the authors do not specify whether the studies refer to children adopted from care, overseas or through other processes such as private adoption and concurrent planning (where adoptive parents foster their child initially). This is important to know as the early life experiences of these children will significantly differ affecting their development and outcomes. It is also important to consider the political and cultural climate of educational policy and practice in order to understand how these factors interplay in the outcomes of children adopted from care. DfE (2018a; 2018b) suggested that 35% of children adopted from care attained GCSE expectations compared with 64% of all pupils. However, this data does not comprehensively account for all children adopted from care in England and Wales. There is currently no routine monitoring of outcomes for children adopted from care. This leaves a gap in our understanding of school performance outcomes children adopted from care in the UK (Howe, 2009).

Through an interpretative phenomenological analysis of the semi-structured interviews of 4 adopted young people Crowley (2019) concluded that a degree of complexity surrounds adoption affecting children's educational and psychological development. The early life experiences of four young people were understood to

be closely related to their psychosocial adjustment, social relationships and their educational development. Adoption UK (2014) surveyed over 1500 adopters about their experiences of their child's education. The authors noted that 71% of parents surveyed said their child's early life affected their ability to manage academic expectations and 75% reported an impact on their child's ability to socialise in school. Additionally, 80% of adopters said their child needed more support than their peers and 59% of parents felt that their child was always trying to catch up in school, making up for their early life experiences. While this research has not been subject to peer review, and recruitment processes mean that the participants are not a representative sample of all adoptive parents, a large number of parents are reporting the effects of early life experience on their child's educational experience. Cooper and Johnson (2007) analysed the data from 100 questionnaires completed by adoptive parents and about a quarter shared concerns about their child's learning, behaviour and friendships. These findings are supported by Brown et al (2017) who found that, adoption was associated with higher levels of behaviour problems and lower academic attainment when compared to non-adopted peers (Brown et al, 2017). However, from a sample of parents who had experienced adoption disruption, Selwyn et al (2014), sighted the concerns of parents as school transitions, school curriculum issues and peer relationship difficulties. However, these were factors identified as stressors for the family rather than being related to educational outcomes.

2:8 Parental Involvement in Education

The Department for Education (DfE, 2011a) note that parental engagement in education has a significant and encouraging impact on children's learning. Parental engagement has been found to have a large and positive impact on children's learning (DfE, 2011; Russell and Granville, 2005; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). Hornby and Lafaele (2011) reviewed the literature in relation to parental involvement in education and found a positive impact on parent-teacher relationships, teacher morale, school climate, pupil attendance, attitude, behaviour, mental health and parental confidence and satisfaction. However, they also noted that while the benefits of parental involvement are well documented, in reality parental involvement was not in general embedded in the practice of schools. In response, a model of factors acting as barriers to parental involvement was proposed which included child factors, individual parent/family factors, parent- teacher factors and societal factors. However, when revisiting the gap between 'rhetoric and reality' Hornby and Blackwell (2018) found that while barriers still exist, expectations around parental involvement in the education of their children has improved with schools having a greater understanding of the benefits of parental involvement and being more pro-active in their engagement of parents. However, these findings are based on interviews with primary school Headteachers or their delegates; this is likely to result in a positive slant on the findings, as they are self-reporting on their own policy and practice. Fan et al (2018) have proposed a reformulated model of Hornby and Lafaele's (2011) model placing societal factors as an overarching influence on the interplay between the other factors. These models demonstrate the complex nature of parental involvement in education. Fan et al (2018) re-

emphasise the need for educators to see beyond simplistic notions of the barriers that prevent the involvement of parents in the education of their children. Rather, what is required is a dismantling of the complex relationships between the different barriers (Fan et al, 2018). In relation to the parent-teacher factor, Hornby and Lafaele (2011) recognised conflict when *'each party seeks to maximise its own agenda, independent of that of the others'* (p.45).

Expectations play a crucial role in shaping the parent-teacher relationship and when parents expect to play a role in the planning and delivery of interventions, the relationship is benefitted (Wolfendale et al, 1999). Russell and Granville (2005) consulted with parents across Scotland with a total of 18 focus groups across 4 local authorities (the authors do not state overall number of participants), to determine parental understanding and experience of their involvement in education. They made a point of involving parents who would not typically be approached for their opinions. Through the focus groups and interviews, they found that there were different levels of involvement that parents engaged with but in general parents' viewed home and school as having very distinct roles. They also heard from parents about their expectations of the school in relation to communication and school responsiveness to issues they raise. To overcome some of the barriers affecting parental involvement, Russell and Granville (2005) recommended that schools appeal to the skills of parents, modify their style and tone of language and make teachers more readily available. While the study aimed to amplify the opinions of those parents who would not normally be heard, it is not clear what type of questions were used in the interviews and focus groups, and there are no details of

how the data was analysed. Additionally, there appears to be a large focus on the shortcomings of parents. However, there are recommendations for schools on what they could do to involve parents more effectively.

There is much research on parent views, parent voice and parental discourse in relation to education. For example, Starr and Foy (2012), surveyed parents of children with autism in relation to their views on their child's education. Themes emerged from their responses to the open-ended questions; schools' management of behaviour, teacher training, schools staff understanding of autism and effective parent-school communication and collaboration. However, this study included the recruitment of participants from a specific parent organisation and as such they were not a representative of all parents of children with autism. Additionally, self-reported experiences may not truly reflect what is occurring in schools. Billington et al (2000), describes the authors' (mother and father and an educational psychologist) experience of the re-assessment of 'a boy described as autistic'. They found that interactions between professionals and parents is often unsuccessful unless it elicits the exchange of experience and expertise with a recognition of the dynamics of social power relations. The SEND Code of Practice promotes parents as equal partners in the education of their child and requires schools to consult with parents regarding educational provision (DfE, 2015). It emphasises the need for parents to be informed, consulted, involved and engaged.

2:9 Adoptive Parents views and experiences of their child's education

Research into adoptive parent's involvement and experiences of their child's education is limited. A number of research articles seek adoptive parents' views on adoption in general often with a focus on parenting and parenting programmes, adoption processes, the presence of birth families and outcomes. However, very few focus on the context of education. Those that do, tend to be conducted by Adoption UK (Charity), PAC UK (Independent adoption support agency) or as part fulfilment for doctorate programmes and are not published in peer-reviewed journals. As such, they have not been subjected to a robust peer review of methodology and analysis. Other research studies include adoptive parents' experiences in relation to education, but as part of a wider focus on parental experience of adoption or have been conducted many years ago. Following a systematic review of the literature, Lyons (2011) notes that the views of adoptive parents' experiences of their children's education is severely lacking.

Cooper and Johnson (2007) in their postal survey, investigated the views of adoptive parents finding that the majority were happy with their child's progress in school. However, there were a significant number concerned about their child's happiness, behaviour in school, learning and friendships. Additionally, 59% of respondents reported that their child had or was having difficulties in school. Most adoptive parents did not express any negative or critical opinions about their child's education suggesting that many children adopted from care, have a positive educational experience. The limited number of responses from children (33 responses from a planned minimum of 100) suggested that enjoyment of school was

varied with 70% expressing some form of dislike. Given the small number of replies from this cohort, the author's statement may be a bold assumption. Cooper and Johnson (2007) collated this data from questionnaires distributed to adoptive parents. The use of questionnaires does not provide a rich picture of experiences or a deep understanding of the responses given. The authors did not provide an example of the questionnaire format or report internal validity and consistency, leaving the reader with questions surrounding reliability of the data collected. Additionally, practice and provision in schools has changed since this research was published and as such, the findings may not be reflective of adoptive parents' experiences in the current context of education.

A number of themes have been sighted in the literature around adoptive parents' experiences of their child's education. The following section considers some of them in turn.

Knowledge and Understanding

Beek (1999) analysed the data from a support group structured around attachment theory for 25 adoptive parents over a two-year period. Open discussions were held with 12 parents and important issues and quotes were recorded. Six parents then reflected on the material accumulated. Five themes were reported, one of which was 'educating others'. Parents reported 'professionals, like teachers, just don't understand the problems. They need to be educated before you begin' (p. 20). This suggests that at this time, schools faced challenges in understanding the needs of adopted children. In particular, they report that there was some belief that

adoption was a 'cure' and as such, there was a lack of understanding about the depth of challenge adopted children faced. However, the findings cannot be generalised to the experiences of all adoptive parents as very few participants attended for the full two years and attendance was likely when parents needed support. Additionally, the support group was delivered through the lens of attachment theory, which may have influenced what was shared. However, the study does offer an in-depth, rich experience over a two year period.

Cooper and Johnson (2007) in their study mentioned earlier in the review, also found a need for a greater understanding of the needs of children adopted from care and improved communication between home and school. Quantitative and qualitative data suggested that a lack of understanding about adoption and the early life experiences of children adopted from care resulted in poor teacher judgements and unrealistic expectations. However, when Selwyn et al (2015) conducted a study into adoption disruptions in order to understand why they occurred and under what circumstances. The study sample and data-set was substantial with surveys being distributed to adoptive parents who had legally adopted a child between April 2002 and March 2004 in 13 different local authorities (the authorities specifically selected to reflect geographical diversity). The authors noted the gratitude expressed by adoptive parents' for school-based support with about 50% of the participants stating that school staff had been helpful and offered support. This is particularly pertinent given the challenges this particular cohort were facing. However, the focus of the study was adoption disruption rather than education. This means that educational experiences may not have been explored in much depth. Selwyn et al

(2015) also highlighted that some adoptive parents experienced a lack of understanding in relation to their children and their experiences.

This is supported by the DfE (2019) who also found that those working within education faced challenges in identifying, understanding and meeting the needs of children in and around the care system. However, information is not provided about the significance of each aspect; identification, understanding and meeting need. As each is reliant on the one before it, it may be assumed if the needs of a child cannot be met, then there is little understanding of the child's needs. However, with the increased profile of the needs of adopted children and the range of attachment and trauma training available, it is important to know whether this knowledge is not yet commonplace, or if it is, is it not being transferred to the classroom. Alternatively, is it more about capacity and provision to meet need. It is important to recognise and understand the distinction between understanding and the ability to meet need. Selwyn et al (2015) found that many adopters had been well informed about their child's needs and the reason for their difficulties but the recommended interventions were often ineffective.

In a national, UK survey of over 1500 adoptive parents, 65% of adoptive parents reported that school staff did not understand the early life experiences of their child and the impact on their engagement at school (Adoption UK, 2014). However, these statistics should be met with caution, as details of methodology and analysis have not been made available. Additionally, the participants are unlikely to be a representative sample as those who have had difficult experiences of their child's

education are more likely to respond to a survey of this nature. Langton and Boy (2017) asked 400 adoptive parents, adopted adults, school staff, education professionals, social workers, virtual heads and governors about the problems and barriers facing adopted children, their families and their schools today. They conducted focus groups with adoptive parents in the north and south of England and telephone conversations with professionals along with visits to nominated schools. Parents reported that while knowledge of adoption is important, they would like schools have an understanding of their individual situations and experiences. Adoption is lifelong and individual to each family affecting them in different ways and at different times. Langton and Boy (2017) also note parental experiences of their children behaving differently at home and at school. Parents report that this can lead to a lack of understanding often leading to apportioning blame to the parents making the relationship between school and home difficult. Again, this research has not been presented in a peer reviewed journal but used to inform the development of a school-based resource. For some adoptive parents their efforts to get others to understand their child's needs left them feeling lonely and frustrated (Beek, 1999; Selwyn et al, 2015; Cooper and Johnson, 2007).

Working with others

Selwyn et al (2015) report that 78% of their participants were generally pleased with the involvement of other agencies. However, a significant number were unhappy and reported a lack of information shared by professionals (Cooper and Johnson, 2007). Some felt that professionals did not treat them as knowledgeable or trustworthy when sharing information. Lyons (2011) and Langton and Boy (2017)

found that adoptive parents consider themselves to be a valuable source of information for schools, being 'experts' on their children. In line with this, NICE (2015) recommend that adoptive parents and children be involved in the design of training courses in relation to attachment wherever possible; utilising their experience and expertise. However, Selwyn et al (2015) spoke about parents' experiences of schools declining their offer to go into school and talk about issues related to the needs of adopted children. Beek (1999) highlighted adoptive parents' frustrations of not being listened to, with some adoptive parents sharing their experiences of school staff avoiding them, and being viewed as demanding in their search for appropriate support (Selwyn et al, 2015). However, there was also a recognition from parents' that at times school staff felt overwhelmed by the needs of the children and did not know how to help.

A lonely battle

Beek (1999) found that parents struggled to find appropriate resources for their children. This battle is one that continues to be a common experience for some adoptive parents (Selwyn et al, 2015). Those parents that had experienced adoption disruption spoke about feeling blamed and alone as their difficulties intensified particularly when faced with a lack of targeted support. They experienced much time spent searching the internet and spoke about the volume of correspondence from liaising with services (Selwyn et al, 2015).

Langton and Boy (2017) suggest that the needs of children adopted from care do not often meet the threshold for Special Educational Provision due to a lack of diagnosis or because they are able to achieve age related expectations.

Impact

Selwyn et al (2015) reported on the experiences of those adoptive families that had experienced adoption disruption in situations where the child had left home and where the family was still together. While educational experience was not identified as a causal factor for adoption disruption, some parents spoke of school exclusions adding to the already challenging situation. For some children adopted from care, being excluded became a contributing element in the disruption of their adoption. Cooper and Johnson (2007) note that difficulties at this extreme end of adoption, many adoptive parents experience feelings of loss and grief as the challenges they face managing the distress of their child affects their employment, friendships, finances and self-worth (Selwyn et al, 2015).

We know from the literature reviewed within this chapter that parental involvement in children's education improves outcomes and progress. Given the needs some adopted children have and the overwhelming benefit of adoption on the development of children adopted from care, it therefore makes sense to involve adoptive parents in the education of their children. In order for this to be effective, firstly it is important to understand how adoptive parents experience their child's education. Using this understanding we can focus on particular aspects pertinent to adopted children and can improve home-school relationships to help inform

practice for Educational Psychologists and school staff. In order that adoptive parents' experiences of their child's education are positive, timely targeted intervention, supportive and understanding professionals and an agreed plan of action have been identified as being helpful (Beek, 1999; Selwyn et al, 2015). Russell and Granville (2005) found that communication, culture and expectations were barriers to parental involvement. While Lyons (2011) states that adoptive parents should be heard, understood and trusted in order to improve parental involvement and partnership with school. Therefore, there is a need for research that explores adoptive parents' experiences in relation to education (Lyons, 2016).

2:10 Role of the EP in adoption.

In some local authorities, Educational Psychologists (EPs) play a key role in the educational support of adopted children. This can involve consultation, assessment, verbal and written advice, video interactive guidance to support attachment and training for school staff and adoptive parents (Daley and Johnson, 2007). However, as with much EP work, EP involvement with children adopted from care and their families varies from one local authority to another. Additionally, with many EP services traded, concerns have been raised about the cost of buying in educational psychologists in relation to children adopted from care (Selwyn et al, 2015). As one of the roles of an EP is consultation, the role of parents in the education of their children is encouraged and the promotion of the home-school relationship is acknowledged as key. In models of consultation, parents are seen as experts in their children. This supports the views of adoptive parents who report having specific knowledge about adoption and in particular their children (Lyons, 2011). However,

it also seems to be at odds with the research and experiences of adoptive parents as not being utilised for their knowledge and experience. Instead adoptive parents report feeling blamed for their children's behaviours. Osborne and Alfano (2011), examined the role of EP-led consultation to support foster carers and adoptive parents. Feedback was collated from 101 EPs and 78 foster or adoptive parents using short questionnaires. They found the consultation sessions to be of benefit to the perceived confidence levels of parents/carers and changes were noted in their concerns. Overall both EPs and parents/carers were positive about their experiences of the consultation sessions. However, the research conducted by the EP service involved had a particular focus on what went well. Additionally, rating scales were used to measure satisfaction and impact which did not give any depth to participants experiences of the sessions. However, the authors used thematic analysis to interpret open-ended questions adding depth to their inquiry. In addition to consultation, Crowley (2019) recommends that the role of the EP in relation to children adopted from care should involve using their psychological knowledge in supporting schools to identify need, potential barriers and appropriately facilitate the effective use of extra pupil premium funding.

2:11 Summary

The needs of children adopted from care are well documented with a recognition that early life experiences can continue to effect development and progress despite the security and permanence that adoption offers. While there has been an increase in adoption research from a number of disciplines, differences in methodology, participant groups and contexts mean that a comprehensive picture

of children adopted from care is still needed, particularly in relation to education-related outcomes (Brown et al, 2019). This is compounded by the challenges in tracking and monitoring outcomes for children adopted from care in the UK. Although adoptive parents' experiences of their children's education have been gathered from large scale surveys, much of this research has not been published in peer reviewed journals. This means that there are challenges in relation to rigour and trustworthiness. Many children adopted from care will face difficulties with friendships, managing distress and academic performance at school. However, it is important to note that this is not the case for all adopted children. It is well documented that parental involvement and participation in schools has a positive impact on pupil wellbeing, progress and attainment. With training opportunities for adoptive parents and their personal motivation to seek knowledge in relation to children adopted from care, they hold a wealth of knowledge and experience that is not yet being utilised by educational professionals. Recognising adoptive parents as experts in their lives and children is fundamental to Educational Psychology consultation. Research into adoptive parents' experiences of their child's education is lacking in the literature. Understanding their experiences could help to inform practice for school staff and educational psychologists, improving support for children adopted from care and their families.

Research Questions

1. What are the stories adoptive parents tell of their experiences in the schooling/ education of their child?
2. How can these stories inform practice for schools and Educational Psychologists?

Chapter Three: Methodology

3:1 Overview

In this section I will set out the position from which I approach this research, making transparent my epistemological and ontological stance. Willig (2013) recognises that this can be a challenge and within this section I will attempt to fulfil her recommendations to address the assumptions I bring about the world, people and knowledge and what my role and relationship is with the knowledge generated from this inquiry.

I will go on to explain the methodology of choice and will be transparent in the decision making process (Given, 2008). I have taken a Narrative approach to this inquiry, using qualitative methods and as such will provide a review of the literature in relation to a Narrative methodology and will reflect on the use of this approach in comparison to alternative methodologies. In doing so I will also acknowledge the limitations of my epistemological position and the Narrative approach.

I will also consider and reflect on the ethical issues related to the inquiry. Quality assurance measures will also be addressed in relation to dependability, transferability and credibility (Denicolo et al, 2017).

I will then set out the research process and methods used, including details of interpretation and analysis.

3:2 Epistemology and Ontology

Epistemology refers to what is knowing? what is known? and what is knowledge? (Given, 2008). To address these philosophical questions in relation to this inquiry, Willig (2013) suggests thinking about what kind of knowledge do I aim to create? In relation to this, I will also reflect on my ontological views, addressing the nature of reality.

Through this investigation, I aim to increase awareness and understanding of adoptive parents' experiences in relation to the education of their children and how this understanding can help to inform practice in schools and within the educational psychology profession. I recognise that while there are systems and structures in place that regulate and guide, there is no single objective reality of these. Rather there are multiple realities influenced by social and cultural meanings and constructs. This reflects the social constructionism perspective that asserts knowledge is negotiated and constructed through social interaction within a particular context and time (Raskin, 2002). The primary focus of a social constructionist inquiry is human meaning making and how this is created through the interaction between the participant and the researcher. In particular, attention is on the use of language and how people construct their realities through the way they talk about the world and their experiences (Willig, 2013). Therefore, I am particularly interested in the stories adoptive parents tell about their experiences. A radical social constructionist would contest that language constructs reality rather than reality determining how we talk about it. Therefore, the focus is on how and why discourse is constructed in a particular way within its context and what purpose

it serves in that context. They would assert that knowledge is fleeting and localised and would therefore focus on the process by which knowledge is constructed. However, while this is important it feels too narrow a focus and does not take account of the dominant discourses, systems and structures that intersect our realities. Taking a moderate social constructionism perspective, I am suggesting that there is a social reality that pre-exists and shapes the way individuals construct meaning in specific social contexts but that this meaning will be very different between individuals. At the same time, I acknowledge that how we talk about something and with someone can influence and change that reality. Therefore, I will consider the wider social context of adoption, education and political climate and how they shape and constrain the stories being shared.

Taking this perspective, I do not intend to understand adoptive parent's experiences phenomenologically but rather focus on the narratives about their experiences and their reality. I acknowledge that the stories shared will be co-constructed between the participant and myself with my responses, experiences and assumptions contributing to the way the story is created.

3:3 Positionality

My positionality also relates to being an adoptive parent and choosing to conduct a research inquiry into adoptive parents' experiences. This situates me as an insider-researcher. There are possibilities and limitations to being in this position. Bonnor and Tolhurst (2002) suggest that having a greater understanding of the culture being studied is an advantage. However, this can bring assumptions about others'

experiences and limit the depth of inquiry assuming that there is shared meaning and understanding. As mentioned above, I believe there are multiple realities and experiences and the purpose of inquiring about the experiences of other adoptive parents is through a recognition that my reality and experience will be very different to that of other adoptive parents. Through being transparent, reflective and reflexive and acknowledging my role in the creation of the stories being told, I believe being an insider- researcher will provide a number of advantages. Being an adoptive parent, I have an insight into the processes, systems and politics of adoption and as such can provide an understanding, non-judgemental and sensitive approach to my interactions with the participants. Additionally, having this knowledge will also allow a natural flow to the stories shared where otherwise it may be necessary to interject with questioning around adoption specific language. Sharing my position as an adoptive parent with the participants and being transparent in the rationale behind the investigation I hope to establish a space in which the participants feel able to share their experiences openly and honestly.

My role as a trainee educational psychologist (TEP) positions me within this investigation and in relation to the participants in a particular way. I have attempted to be transparent in the Introduction about the experience and knowledge I bring to this research and how this will influence the direction of the investigation. However, I am also aware of the influence my status as a TEP will have on the participants and the power disparity that may emerge. Despite not being fully qualified, I have found that my position as a TEP is received by others in a way that assumes a particular knowledge and status associated with the title

psychologist. Being aware of this and reflecting on this throughout the process, I would hope to minimise any power imbalance. O'Grady (2005), recognises that in acknowledgement there is as an opportunity for minimising the inevitable presence of power. Additionally, by taking a social constructionist narrative approach and seeking the knowledge and experience of others, I hope to give power to the participants in amplifying their voices and experiences.

In addition to this, I approach this inquiry as a white, working-class, well-educated female. As a feminist I am very conscious of the power that these categories can hold and also the assumptions and judgements that can be applied, particularly being female. Being someone who is not particularly forthcoming in sharing personal experiences and feelings, I have been in many situations where I have felt misunderstood and misjudged. It is therefore important to me that people are heard and understood, particularly by those who hold proportionally more power and control over systems and structures than others.

As a TEP people want to hear what I have to say, but in my experience as a parent I struggle to be heard as school staff appear reluctant to listen. This juxtaposition highlights the complex home-school relationship and the delicate nature of the interactions between parents and school staff. I will therefore consider the role of power within the interactions between parents and school staff and educational practices. As a feminist, I want to amplify voices that have not been heard in order to influence policy and practice within education. By understanding the experiences of adoptive parents my aim is to amplify adoptive parents' voices to be heard and understood by school staff and educational psychologists who are positioned with

greater power and control over the educational experiences of adopted children. This juxtaposition also plays a part in my interactions with the participants. I consider this throughout the inquiry as I reflect on my positionality and the direction of the study. In my reflections I will also consider how my identity in relation to feminism and social change influences this inquiry.

As I aim to generate new knowledge from a small number of participants in order to greater understand the experiences of adoptive parents in relation to their child's education, this will be an inductive inquiry.

3:4 The search for Method

While searching for the most appropriate method that would allow me to access and understand the experiences of adoptive parents in relation to the education of their child/children I was drawn to a number of qualitative methodologies: Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), Grounded Theory and Narrative.

Qualitative research is used to provide rich in-depth data in order to create original knowledge that can inform policy and practice and develop understanding of human experience.

I was drawn to Grounded Theory as I was keen to gather rich data. I liked the idea of gathering and analysing qualitative data in a systematic way (Charmaz, 2006) as this felt reassuring at a time when everything felt uncertain. Grounded Theory involves learning about research participant's lives and this is what I wanted to achieve with adoptive parents. It is a process by which theory is generated from the data rather

than being led by hypotheses generated from the literature. I felt this would help to shift the focus away from my experiences and preconceived ideas. However, on closer inspection I found that the data analysis involves separating, sorting and synthesising through coding and this felt too detached and I didn't like the idea of distilling the data, it almost feels like the person who spoke the words has been lost in the cutting and pasting of their experiences. Additionally, the focus is on getting an 'analytic' grasp of the data and a 'conceptual handle' on the studied experience in order to develop an 'abstract theoretical understanding of the studied experience.'

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was also considered as I was keen to understand the experiences of adopted parents. IPA is guided by the values of the philosophical concept of phenomenology which centres on the ways people gain knowledge of the world (Willig, 2001). It is an interpretive approach to research that seeks to understand how participants experience their world concentrating on their understanding, perceptions and views. This focus is a fundamental principle of constructivism (Denicolo, 2017) and as such fits with my epistemological positioning. However, Willig (2001) notes that there are many similarities between Grounded Theory and IPA, particularly in the terminology used and the systematic guiding processes. She argues that the presentation of findings in IPA suggests a sense of discovery rather than construction.

While there is a recognition of the role of the researcher, in the implication of their views and through their interaction with the participant, IPA does not focus upon the social constructive interactions within the interview. Additionally, through the

process of IPA generalisations are made for uniform groups to establish assumptions about human behaviours (Smith et al, 2009). I did not have the intention of generalising the experiences of adoptive parents as I recognise that experiences are relational, context dependent and unique to each individual. As such I rejected IPA and turned to Narrative to address my research purpose and make sense of the phenomena.

3:5 A Narrative Approach

Carless and Douglas (2017) see narrative as both a perspective for addressing psychological and social experiences and also a research method. In this section I will consider how a Narrative approach can illuminate personal experiences, their meaning and the sociocultural context they are shaped by.

Storytelling is part of human nature and as such is a universal medium that is present across all cultures and generations (Polkinghorne, 2004; Bruner, 1986; Reissman, 2008). It is central to how we relate to others, how we make sense of the world around us, our perception and memory (Bruner, 1986; Hiles and Cermak, 2009). Storying personal experience helps to organise and connect events; detailing what happened, who was involved, when it occurred, where and the outcome (Carless and Douglas, 2017). However, this is not done through objectively narrating actual events rather it is the subjective experience of those events that is shared and shaped through narratives (Warham, 2012). In this way narratives enable us to make sense of and give meaning to our own actions and that of others. The stories people tell allow a re-storying of their past and as time passes and new

experiences occur, we reflect back on memories with a different focus and perspective. This reformation of thoughts and memories repositions ourselves and others in the stories we tell and offers a valuable insight into our lived experience (Hatton, 2016). In addition to this, the context in which we tell our stories also shapes what is told and how it is expressed. Therefore, many different narratives can be shared about the same event over time and in different contexts. Raskin (2002), explains *'how people talk about themselves and their world determines the nature of their experiences'* (pg. 10)

As stories are positioned within a particular time and context, they are shaped by dominant sociocultural narratives (Carless and Douglas, 2013). Willig (2013), explains that the telling of experience is more than sharing an inner reality or representing social/psychological processes, it is also about understanding how dominant narratives or constructs are incorporated into the way in which experiences are storied and the consequences of this for those who are situated within them. As some narratives are more dominant than others, social constructionists are interested in what role power plays in constructing our realities. Smail (2005) defines power in its broadest sense as the *'means of obtaining security and advantage'* often over that of others. Although, power can be used for both positive and negative purposes. Foucault (1980) saw systems of power as inextricably linked to language and the production of knowledge and as such a central influence within social structures. Foucault was particularly interested in the less visible forms of power; *'power exercised rather than possessed, as relational rather than top-down'* (O'Grady, 2005).

'The influence of power on narratives is seen not only in their embodiment of currently ruling ideas in society but also in the ways in which they are not equally available or valued – simply because a narrative exists does not mean that it is regarded as legitimate or worthy' (Johnstone and Boyle, 2018 pg. 83).

Warham (2012), emphasises the importance of reflecting on where narratives are positioned in relation to social, historical and cultural context.

In addition to context shaping the stories being told, the listener is also integral to how narratives are constructed (Elliott, 2011). Interactions and dynamics between story teller and listener interweave the words spoken to co-construct a narrative. However, people can also be purposeful and persuasive in their use of words and symbols, having a personal agenda behind their narrative (Burr, 2006). Stories can be used to serve a function and be performed according to how the story teller wants to be understood (Patterson, 2013). As such narratives may be used to persuade, reminisce, engage, explore, explain or entertain. However, our narratives are constrained to versions that actually relate to our knowledge and experience and as such it is not possible to simply choose any narrative to story our lives (Polkinghorne, 2004).

3:6 Narrative Interviewing

Squire (2013) highlights a lack of methodological guidelines for some narrative research which could be seen as a criticism. However, narrative research allows for flexibility and creativity for addressing the complex nature of human experience.

During narrative based interviews both the interviewer and interviewee become active participants in the formation of the stories and the meaning they hold. This is

in stark contrast to the more traditional methods of interview where the focus is on questions and answers. In narrative based interviews, the process is similar to the turn taking of everyday conversation. However, it is important to recognise that some participants may not feel comfortable sharing lengthy detailed accounts of their experiences and having the expectation that they should, can put undue pressure on the interviewee. Carless and Douglas (2017) suggest that an empathetic and trusting relationship between interviewer and interviewee built over time is key to good narrative research. These factors enable interviewees to express themselves openly and share their vulnerabilities. Reismann (2008), explains that active listening, giving up control to follow the interviewee down their trail of thought and allowing greater equality in the conversation enables the interviewer to elicit the complex details of an experience. She further explains that during the exchange the focus should be on emotional attentiveness, engagement and reciprocity in the conversation rather than the specific wording of the questions. Therefore, narrative interviewing does not follow a set of procedures as such.

3:7 Ethical considerations

Throughout this inquiry, I was guided by the ethical standards issued by The University of Sheffield and the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2014) and ethical approval was attained from The University of Sheffield prior to the commencement of the research.

In order that the participants were fully informed about the research, they were provided with written information (See Appendix) and an opportunity to meet and discuss the research in more detail and have any questions answered. Following this, participants were asked to sign a consent form (See Appendix) to confirm they understood the aims and objectives of the research, the processes and procedures and their agreement to participate. Throughout the research, I checked in with participants to ensure that they were happy and fully informed about where they are up to in the process and that their involvement matched with their expectations.

Given my inside researcher position I was aware that the nature of the inquiry had the potential to be emotive for the participants. The journey of adoption is challenging and elicits a whole host of emotions that may come to the surface when reflecting on personal experiences. Participants were informed about the potential for heightened emotions during the interview and given the option to pause or end the interview if needed. Given the sensitive nature of the research, I wanted to provide a safe and confidential space in which the participants could feel comfortable sharing their stories. To fulfil this, I was guided by the participants' preferred location and consequently all interviews took place in the participants' homes. This also ensured that the interviews were carried out in an informal manner which aligned with the narrative approach to interviewing and adopts a more conversational format. However, Elliott (2011) warns that the very nature of conducting an interview that takes on the characteristics of two friends having a conversation can leave participants open to exploitation. It is of upmost importance to me that those I work with are prioritised, respected and protected against any

potential harm that may unintentionally arise. This means holding participants in mind and being conscious of and preparing for potential difficulties. Participants were fully informed about the area of focus during the semi-structured interview and the type and process of questioning that would elicit a more conversational interaction rather than a question and answer structure. The Participants consented to the interviews being audiotaped on a dictaphone and were informed about the procedures for ensuring anonymity and confidentiality.

All recorded interviews were uploaded and stored electronically with password protection and anonymised using codes instead of participant names. The interviews were then deleted from the audio equipment but saved on hard-drives and personal computer. Written transcripts arising from audio recordings have been anonymised using the same study number and also stored on password protected devices. While anonymity and confidentiality is a key ethical principle, Elliott (2011), recognises that despite putting measures in place, the nature of narrative research data can inadvertently expose the identity of participants to those that know them through sharing their unique stories. To protect against this, I will request that the completed thesis is withheld for a period of time. I will also consider anonymising or redacting sections of the original transcripts that may risk revealing the identification of participants.

A further ethical issue to consider is during the interpretation and analysis of the stories produced in the interviews. The way in which this is conducted and recorded may have an impact on the participants. As researcher my account and

interpretation of the stories shared has the potential to compromise and undermine the individual experiences of the participants (Elliott, 2011). However, in utilising thematic analysis I will be attempting to keep the stories intact as much as possible and rather than imposing an authoritarian interpretation of their experiences I will be using reflection and wondering about the pertinent aspects of their experiences.

3:8 Quality in Research: dependability, credibility and transferability

Qualitative research does not adhere to the same measures of rigor and quality as quantitative research. Mainly because it does not seek to objectively measure a phenomenon in the same way quantitative research does. Riessman (2008), states that evaluation of qualitative research should be considered in relation to the ontological and epistemological positioning of the research. As I am addressing this inquiry from a constructivist perspective, I refer to Denicolo et al (2017) who emphasise the necessity to produce credible, dependable and transferable research. In order to do this, Hiles and Cermak (2007) see the notion of transparency as the crucial marker in evidencing quality in research. To demonstrate transparency throughout the research process, I have been clear and open about the theoretical and methodological framework, interpretation and analysis of data and have provided reflexive accounts that allow the reader an understanding of the decision-making process and how I am positioned within the research.

Denicolo et al (2017), position credibility in direct comparison to validity with reference to appropriate research design. They state that the design and methods used within a constructivist research inquiry should be robustly appropriate for the

for the phenomena and the research purpose. Yardley (2017) terms this as 'commitment and rigor' detailing the need for thorough data collection, expertise and skill in the methods employed and a detailed in-depth analysis.

Dependability refers to trustworthiness (Denicolo et al, 2017). Goodley (2011) relates this to the trustworthiness of the stories shared by the participants and the story told by the researcher through their interpretation and analysis. This involves careful consideration of the perspective of the participants and the meanings they generate in relation to the context of the research, how this interplay influences and informs the other and finally how this is interpreted by the researcher (Yardley, 2017). Pragmatically, Riessman (2008) states that researchers need to demonstrate they have followed an explicit methodological process guided by theoretical and ethical considerations.

Social constructivism proposes that meaning is co-constructed and context dependent and so research based on this assumption does not seek to generalise findings. However, Denicolo et al (2017) identify two ways in which qualitative research can be transferable. The ability to replicate the research design, methodology, tools and techniques is one sign of quality. While another is the degree to which the insights and findings can help and inform policy and practice by provide an understanding of the phenomena (Yardley, 2017).

3:9 Critical reflexivity

Reflexivity in research is a defining feature of a qualitative inquiry and one that sets it apart from more traditional quantitative research in which objectivity and impartiality is valued. Being reflexive, acknowledges that research is not conducted in isolation, it provides transparency in the process of inquiry and draws the researcher into view recognising the continuum between the researcher and the researched. Dean (2017) states that reflexivity is the way in which we consider our positionality in relation to where we are situated within the social and institutional structures of our lives, how we come to be there and the dynamics that may maintain or distort our position. Therefore, considering my position as researcher it is important to think about how my race, social class, gender, disposition, beliefs and ideas may influence the direction of this inquiry, the co-constructed narratives, analysis and interpretation. While reflexivity in research continues to cause confusion and doubt (Dean, 2017), Gough (2017) sees reflexivity as an essential part of the qualitative research process and an opportunity to enhance investigations, positioning it from a particular perspective and within a particular context. In being reflective and reflexive throughout this inquiry, I am reaffirming my social constructionism position that knowledge is located, co-constructed and fluid (Raskin, 2002; Gough, 2017).

There are a number of approaches to being reflexive. Throughout this inquiry, I draw upon a feminist approach outlined by Wilkinson (1988), which I feel fits with the typical process of reflexivity that I engage with. She proposes three forms of reflexivity; personal, professional and disciplinary. Personal reflexivity refers to

identity, motivation, individual preferences, experience and knowledge. Wilkinson (1988) highlights the regularity of research topics that evolve from the life circumstances and personal concerns of the researcher and how this continues to influence the research process and outcome. Professional reflexivity refers to research practices such as interpersonal dynamics and communication style. While Disciplinary reflexivity refers to the theory, method and epistemological positioning. Gough (2017) emphasises the interconnectivity of the three forms of reflexivity. Wilkinson (1988) highlights reflexivity in research as a two-way process that should consider not only how the researcher's life experience influences the research but also how the research influences life experience. However, Pels (2000) cautions against being too reflexive as there is a risk of overshadowing the subject of interest.

In the introduction to this thesis I have included information about my experiences and motivations for conducting this inquiry. I have set out my epistemological and ontological position and how my individuality positions me as researcher in relation to the topic and process of this inquiry. Throughout the inquiry I have provided reflections on the choices I have made, my role in the research and aspects of personal, professional and disciplinary reflexivity. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate transparency and authenticity in the research process in order to produce a dependable research inquiry.

3:10 Pilot Study

I conducted a pilot study to practice the narrative approach to interviewing as I had not previously interviewed without a structured framework of questions. A

colleague within the educational psychology service shared information about my research and my first participant made contact via email expressing an interest in being involved in the research. A meeting was arranged at her home address to answer any questions, sign the consent form and agree a date for the interview. The interview was also conducted in the participant's home. I tested and prepared the audio equipment the day before and double checked it's functioning on the morning of the interview. I took with me a selection of narrative interview questions (See Appendix) that focused on building rapport, core questions related to the aims and objectives of the research inquiry and greater depth questions to understand contextual, embodied, relational and decisive elements of their experience.

The following reflections informed the organisation and approach for the subsequent interviews:

Having arranged the pre-interview visit to clarify any concerns and sign the consent forms, the participant made it known that she would have been happy to conduct the interview at that time rather than arranging an additional date. On reflection, I decided to continue to offer a pre-interview meeting but take the participant's lead in whether they would prefer to combine both occasions into one.

I initially offered to arrange a suitable venue to conduct the interview but as the participant was giving up their time to meet with me, I felt that it was appropriate to minimise any inconvenience and travel to meet at their home address. On reflection, the home environment created a more informal and relaxed atmosphere

which helped to facilitate a more natural conversation. In addition to this, I felt privileged being welcomed into her home as it was almost like being physically drawn into her narrative adding an extra dimension to the stories. I was able to situate her experiences and the stories she told more vividly than I would have been able to if we had met in a nondescript office within a neutral venue. I also felt the balance of power was more aligned being a guest in the participant's home.

I informed the participant of my position as an adoptive parent prior to the interview explaining the aims and objectives of the research. I felt that this helped the participant to relax and feel more comfortable in the unusual context of being interviewed in her kitchen.

I utilised the initial 'building rapport' questions to facilitate the conversation. I was grateful for these initial questions as they gave a starting point from which the participant could then lead the conversation. However, further into the interview I felt a degree of uncertainty in just clarifying, summarising and affirming. I was conscious of my research questions and the desire to gather information that might inform practice and policy. As such towards the end of the interview I asked a lot more questions that were driven by my curiosity. While I feel there was enough time given to following the participant in co-constructing the stories in the pilot study, being aware of my own interests and resisting the temptation to fall into a question and answer session at the end of the interview is important in the subsequent interviews.

During the interview I was conscious of my position and the dual identities of TEP and adoptive parent. I was approaching the interview from my experiences as an adoptive parent but experiencing the conversation as I would in my position as a TEP. Bringing the two together into my role as researcher I was acutely aware of the guiding influence my experiences were having in the interview and the co-construction of the narratives.

Chapter 4: Procedure

4:1 Recruitment

In the first instance, the Head of the Adoption Services in the local authority was contacted to seek advice regarding recruitment of participants. It was hoped that I would be put in contact with potential participants. However, this was not successful. My second option was to seek the support of the educational psychologists in the service I was placed. Through this route, I was linked up with my first participant with whom I piloted the interview schedule. This participant offered to share information about the research with other adoptive parents she knew. I was then contacted via email by my second participant who also offered to contact other adoptive parents on my behalf. It was via this route that I contacted my third participant.

Reflections:

The recruitment process was challenging, and I was worried that I would only end up with two participants. Fortunately, I was able to interview three adoptive parents. However, I was still disappointed that I did not secure a sample of four as intended. Following this recruitment process, I was concerned about all the participants being located in one particular middle-class area which I thought would have limited the diversity of experience. However, this was not the case as the three participants provided rich diverse experiences.

4:2 Participants

Of the three participants, one was a Mum with adopted twins (a daughter and son), the second was a Dad with two adopted sons and the third was a Mum with one

adopted son. They were all recruited from the north west of England using opportunistic sampling.

Reflections:

I was very pleased that I had managed to recruit a father, as I was not confident about doing this. Working as a TEP, the majority of parents I see are Mothers and I feel that the father's voice and experience is often lacking.

Although I was pleased that the participants offered a diversity in circumstances and experiences, I wondered about the effect of this in relation to the sample size.

Would it matter? Would there be too much variability to be able to inform practice. However, I felt that it would provide an interesting dimension to the study

The sample size was such that the detailed experience of each individual participant was to remain central and visible within the study. It also allowed an in-depth analysis of each case without becoming too impractical in terms of time and amount of data (Robinson, 2014). It was of ethical consideration that the parents had at least one child who they adopted from care for a period of 2 years or more. This was to ensure that a sufficient period of time had been allowed for families to have adjusted to their new familial circumstances. For the purpose of the research inquiry, parents with primary age pupils were sought to avoid any possible difficulties in relation to identity formation and developmental factors associated with young people going through adolescence. The challenges young people can face at this time in their life and in particular those young people who have been adopted may impact on adoptive parents' experiences of their child's education and could potentially be a very emotive time for adoptive parents. In addition to this, I requested that parents did not have any relationship with their child's school other

than as a parent. (ie. Not a teacher/ staff/ governor). This was to ensure that they were sharing their stories from the perspective of parent.

4:3 Conducting the Interviews

I shared the information sheet with each participant prior to conducting the interviews. Participants had the option of where to hold the interview and were given the opportunity for a pre-visit to answer any questions and the sign consent form. With the exception of the first participant used as a pilot, the subsequent participants were happy to sign the consent forms on the day of the interview.

Each interview was conducted at the homes of the participants on their request. Information shared with participants prior to the interview and included my position as an adoptive parent and the aims and purpose of the research and methods of analysis.

Rapport building questions were used to get context information and settle into the conversation (See appendix for the Interview Schedule). However, in general subsequent questions were in response to the flow of the co-constructed narrative.

Each interview was recorded using a Dictaphone and then uploaded to a password protected laptop and then deleted from the Dictaphone. The interviews were then transcribed in full.

4:4 Data Analysis

At each stage of the research process I explored the options available that best fit with my epistemological position, my values and the objectives of the research. It was important to me that the essence of the research was humanistic in nature with a focus on the people at the heart of the study. I also wanted the research to reflect the relational nature of my work as a trainee educational psychologist and be an authentic reflection of my values as a researcher, TEP and human being.

With this in mind, thinking about how to gather the data needed to answer my research questions a narrative approach best fit these criteria. A narrative approach facilitated the sharing of the participants' experiences by allowing them to lead the direction of their story. By adopting the natural interaction of a conversation, this created a space in which participants had the best opportunity to feel relaxed and allowed time for genuine interest in what they had to say rather than being led by a set of questions. In this way I was also able to connect with the participants in an attempt to address the balance of power and facilitate an open and non-judgemental approach.

I considered continuing with a narrative approach at stage of analysing the data, in particular, structural analysis based on the work of Labov (1972) which looks at the function of clauses within a narrative. However, I soon realised that my aim was to understand 'what' experiences the participants had rather than 'how' or 'why' they spoke about them in a particular way. I then considered thematic analysis as a way of understanding the events and experiences of the participants.

Typically, narrative research is seen as distinct and different to thematic analysis as they both focus on very different aspects of the data. Byrne (2017) highlights the difference in terms of breadth (Thematic) versus depth (Narrative). Narrative analysis is case centred and stories within individual narratives are preserved as much as possible to understand the way in which the stories are told, to whom and for what purpose (Reissman, 2008). During thematic analysis emphasis is on what the language refers to and as such whole stories are not the focus. Rather, the data is coded and categorised according to themes across cases. In this vein, “. . . *language is viewed as a resource rather than a topic of enquiry.*” (Reissman, 2008 p.59). However, in Narrative research the role of language can also depend upon the epistemological position of the researcher (Byrne, 2017). Reissman (2008) believes that a thematic approach can be appropriate for a wide range of narrative data. She considers research that has successfully used thematic analysis with narrative data.

Williams (1984) uses thematic analysis to identify underlying assumptions within narrative accounts of illness. Williams incorporates features of a narrative approach through being case focused and analysing the narrative as a whole. At the same time, he uses thematic analysis to identify the underlying assumptions being shared within those single case narratives (Reissman, 2008).

Ewick and Silbey (2003) analysed stories of people in less powerful positions to understand the moments of resistance to authority through small acts of defiance

that disturb social structures. They used narrative principles to identify stories and then coded and categorised the stories thematically. They were not particularly interested in the form of the narrative, only the thematic meanings (Reissman, 2008).

While I have adopted a narrative approach to the interviews and as a way of relating to the participants, based on the work of Williams (1984), I will also keep some narrative features in the analysis of the data by being case focused and where practical I will attempt to keep as much of the narrative intact as possible. However, in order to understand the 'what' in adoptive parents' narratives of their experiences I will turn to thematic analysis.

4:5 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is commonly used in narrative research and focuses on the content of what is spoken or written. The emphasis of analysis is on the interpretation of meaning and understanding of the narrative content. There are different ways of conducting thematic analysis using different kinds of data, perspectives and definitions. This means that there is no one way to conduct thematic analysis and as such there are no set rules to follow. However, to be sure that the process of analysis is thematic, attention should be on '*what is said rather than 'how', 'to whom' or 'for what purposes'*' (Reissman, 2008 p. 54). Additionally, narrative thematic analysts rarely pay attention to the interviewer's role in the construction of the narrative, presenting the story without the conversational frame. This aspect of thematic analysis does not reflect my epistemological

perspective. However, my role and contribution to the construction and interpretation of the narratives will be reflected upon and referred to throughout the process.

I considered the work of Williams (1984) who used thematic analysis to interpret interviews about chronic illness. I was drawn to his work as he focused on the individual meaning-making of three participants, presenting them as case studies. He was able to keep their narratives intact, interpreting them as a whole rather than coding them into thematic categories. In this way he was able to keep a sense of the person behind the words. However, as the focus is on the content of what is spoken, each narrative was tidied up to make it easy to read. His interpretation of their narratives was theoretically driven making reference to psychological, religious and political perspectives. In his interpretation, Williams (1984), worked with each narrative in turn to identify and order relevant events including all speech that related to his subject. Following this he identified and coded any underlying assumptions for each participant. Although Williams's approach is appealing due to his focus on presenting the narrative as it was intended by the participant, practicalities of word limitations and the scope of this thesis means that his approach to thematic analysis was not possible.

I turned to the work of Braun and Clarke (2006) who propose a loose structure for capturing themes. A theme reflects meaning or a patterned response within the narrative which speaks to the research question. Braun and Clarke (2006) identify a number of choices that need to be made in the process of capturing themes within a

narrative. The first being what constitutes a theme. There are no rules about the frequency or size a theme is required to be and some degree of flexibility and consistency is recommended (Clarke and Braun, 2017). While I am aware of my positionality and influence in the process of interpretation and analysis, I attempted to be inductive in identifying themes to reflect the narratives rather than my own preconceptions. This was appropriate in relation to my research questions and my desire to understand the experiences of other adoptive parents.

I combined the work of Williams (1984) and Braun and Clarke (2006) in order to reflect my epistemological position and my values in relation to the representation and interpretation of someone's story and experience. With regard to Williams (1984) I chose to work with each narrative in turn, following a process based on the work of Braun and Clarke (2006) to identify themes individual to each participant. In doing so I emphasise and respect the experiences of each participant as being individual and distinctive and attempt to keep a sense of them in the analysis of the co-constructed narratives. However, I then consider themes that are present across the narratives, thinking about related yet distinct aspects of the themes. Table 1 sets out the stages of analysis for each narrative.

Reflections:

I really struggled with deciding on the most appropriate method of analysis. I initially considered Structural Analysis as it takes into account the co-construction of the narrative and the meaning of what is said. However, I wanted to focus on the content of what was said rather than how it was said. I was keen to keep the narratives whole as they were expressed so powerfully, and you can feel the emotion of their situations in what they say. However, it was not practical to do this due to the word limit. Therefore, I have provided an introduction to each participant and attempted to keep as much of the reconstruction of their experience/ narrative whole but due to word count have reduced down to Main Themes.

Table 4:1: Stages of analysis

Stage	Description
1	Interview fully transcribed (See Appendix)
2	Transcription read and re-read
3	Transcript abbreviated and 'tidied up' (See Appendix)
4	Abbreviated transcript read
5	Abbreviated transcript coded (See Appendix)
6	Coded transcript separated into themes (See Appendix)
7	Main themes highlighted together with potential subthemes.
8	Similar yet distinct themes highlighted across narratives

Chapter Five: Analysis

In this chapter narrative thematic analysis has been used to present the primary themes from each participant's narrative. Each participant is introduced with a summary of their situation and context. Their stories are then presented in relation to the primary themes and analysed in order to answer the research question '*What are the stories adoptive parents tell of their experiences in the schooling/ education of their child?*' The final section draws together the overarching themes across the participants to consider '*How can these stories inform practice for schools and Educational Psychologists?*'

5:1 Anna's Story

I met with Anna at her home in a market town in the north west of England. We sat at a table in her living room while she shared her experiences of her son's schooling in a narrative co-constructed during our conversation.

Anna is a mother to a 6-year-old boy, who she adopted with her partner four years ago. At the time of the interview, they had recently moved to the area and their son was in his second year of being home-schooled. Anna gave up work to home-school her son. Her partner works full time.

Anna reflected on the adoption process and her memories of the first months following their son's arrival.

“ . . . He was the first child that we thought about . . . it seemed to go really well . . . We thought [son] was all right . . . he seemed fine but then

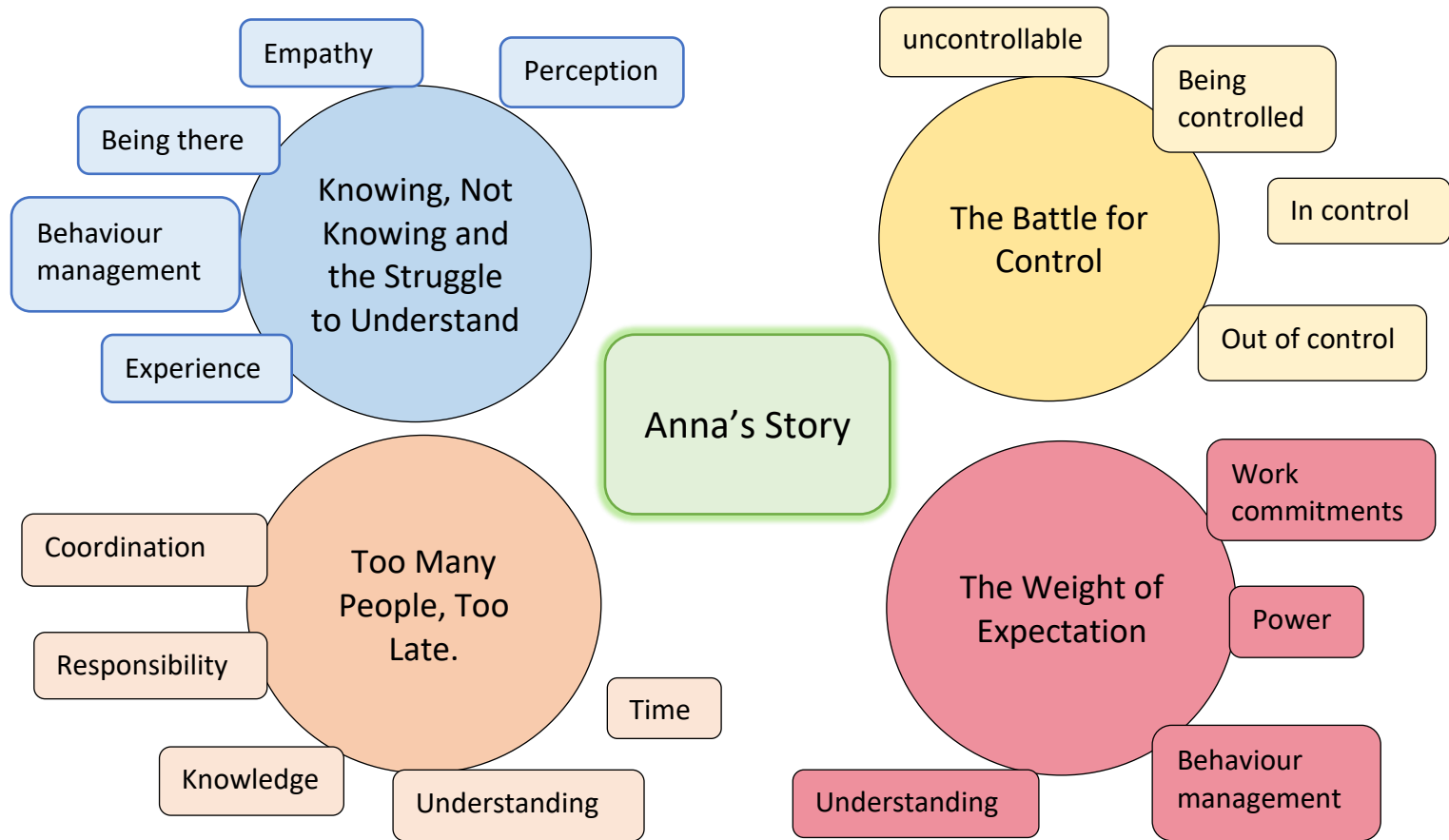
he started to get really aggressive. I think he was probably in shock for the first 3 months and we didn't know, we thought he was all right and he really wasn't . . . I think he was just angry with us because we took him away, he didn't understand, then he gradually got better with us . . . He was with us for 8 or 9 months . . . with just him at home and my partner was off as well . . . So, we gave him as good a start as we could really. . . " (Line 2 to 16)

Their son started Nursery part time, ". . . he did ok, he was fine, really good and he made friends and got on well with the teachers." (Line 17) Anna highlights a turning point at which her son's presentation in school significantly changed: starting in his Reception Year.

"There was about 5 incidents of him being aggressive and quite badly aggressive like picking up a chair and threatening the teacher with it. Things that they were shocked by . . . more than other kids . . . we were a little bit worried but not too bad. And then, when he went to reception it was just horrific . . . a million times worse, awful, horrendous . . . within days, he just couldn't cope with it . . ." (Line 18 to 23)

My interpretation of the remaining narrative highlighted four main themes that featured in Anna's reconstruction of her experiences. A full thematic map of the four main themes and associated subthemes is detailed in Figure 1. Each main theme is then explored and presented in the subsequent subsections.

Figure 5:1: Full Thematic Map: Anna



Theme 1: The Battle for Control

Control is a theme that runs throughout Anna's narrative and relates to having or not having control, being controlled and being uncontrollable. Control is synonymous with power and authority and there is a sense throughout Anna's experience that there is an ongoing struggle for power and control between all those involved in the education of her son. The first indication of this struggle comes when Anna states, "*. . . after 3 days the teachers said we're really worried because he won't follow instructions . . . he won't do what we tell him, he'll just go off and do his own thing. . .*" (Line 23 to 25) Anna's son did not conform to the expectation of schools that children are required to follow adult direction. This threat to authority and control became greater when;

" . . . he started to be really aggressive to her and the teaching assistants and then he started to be aggressive to the other children and just, very quickly within a few weeks it was just totally unmanageable. He just spent all day being aggressive . . . it got worse and worse and worse, you know trashing classes, biting, kicking. You know they couldn't do anything with him . . ." (Line 25 to 32)

Ann's story is an emotive one that is torn between acknowledging and understanding the impact of her son's behaviour on others and recognising the underlying reason for her son's behaviours. Again, this is understood in relation to control:

" . . . I think his life was so out of control for a few years. He had four different families and he was only 2 years 9 months but . . . just that a

part from anything else . . . when he was still at home; a lot of fighting and arguing. . . all of his experience is pretty uncontrollable and he didn't know what was going to happen to him next.” (Line 147 to 150)

At the same time Anna struggled with her sense of control over the situation. Grappling with her responsibilities as a Mum and yet not having control over the situation at school. However, it is not clear if this sense of responsibility is one which she gives to herself or whether it is apportioned by others in their state of not knowing.

“ . . . everybody was out of control. Nobody knew what to do . . . He was out of control, I couldn't control it because I wasn't there. I felt like it was my responsibility, but I wasn't there . . . and they looked to me like what shall we do, and I was just like, I don't know, he's not like this at home, so I didn't know. I wanted them to tell me what to do or you know I thought they'd know what to do but they didn't. . .” (Line 214 to 219)

There is a sense that Anna was wanting someone to take control where she was unable to, someone that knew what to do. This may indicate that Anna perceives a lack of knowledge as contributing to the lack of control the adults had over the situation. In a similar vein, Anna's lack of control can be understood in relation to her lack of knowledge about the situation in school due to not being there.

In contrast when reflecting on the experience of home-schooling Anna talks about it being *“ . . . much more manageable because I'm there all the time . . . so I can step in if I see something happening. I can remove him . . . and in school he was*

uncontrollable but outside . . . [he] doesn't really stand out that much, only a little bit . . ." (Line 106 to 110) This fulfils that sense of responsibility she felt she had when her son was in school but was not able to meet.

The following extract summarises the theme 'control'. Anna paints an emotive picture of her experience using words such as 'hated him', 'couldn't cope', 'in tears', 'chaos' and 'destroyed'. She explores the role of experience in relation to being in control but finds that even with years of experience staff were unable to cope. The extreme circumstances described in the extract below may have been reconstructed in such a way as to justify the unconventional resolution to home school their son.

"His teaching assistant hated him . . . She was very young, she was like 23 something like that, she just couldn't cope with him. And they got someone who was about to retire, she'd been doing it 25 years. But she couldn't cope with him either. We used to hand over to her . . . and she'd be in tears before he'd even started . . . 'we don't know what to do with him, he's so unpredictable' she used to cry because she felt so sad about it I think . . . Nobody was in control. We had one that hated him and one that was crying, everyone else running around not knowing. He'd just completely cause chaos in that school. . . he was in control of them all . . . he destroyed the school, he was only 4." (Line 331 to 350)

The thought of sending her son back to mainstream school even for one hour a day provides an insight into Anna's previous experiences battling for control with the professionals involved. Anna foresees a situation where she lacks a

sense of agency and has to hand over control of what happens to her and her son to people that do not understand. There is a sense that when being controlled choice is limited.

“That’s an hour a day I’m tied to the school, I’d have to do what they tell me. It’s involving lots of professionals. You know it’s very stressful, meetings and people that don’t understand. This way I’m in control of it. . . I’d be controlled by them you know, I wouldn’t be able to do what I wanted . . .” (Line 197 to 201)

Control is something that Ann talks about explicitly. Her experience speaks of a need for control in order that those around her are able to cope. She perceives that her son claimed control in school in order that he was able to cope with the environment. She talks of the staff not having control and the resulting chaos that ensued. Anna tells a story of her own search for control in a situation that was out of her control. In the end, Anna feels she has no other choice but to take control of her son’s education, *“I made it really clear that I felt we were forced to do this . . . I kept saying, ‘we’re doing this because you haven’t been able to provide anywhere that can manage him.’”* (Line 402 to 405)

Theme 2: Knowing, Not Knowing and the Struggle to Understand

Knowing and not knowing are mentioned throughout the transcript and often relate to Anna’s position within the story. From her reconstruction of her son’s early days with them, *“I think he was in shock for the first 3 months and we didn’t know, we thought he was alright, and he really wasn’t.”* (Line 9) to reflecting on his move to

the Reception class, *"I didn't know he was going to struggle. . . we hadn't realised."* (Line 36) As well as the realisation about her son's needs, *" . . . now we know, we didn't know he just needs adults looking after him all the time . . . he needs a lot to feel safe which I didn't realise."* (Line 45; 139) Anna's story presents as a journey where they have travelled from a state of not knowing to a position where they have a sense of knowing and understanding their son.

Reflection: This journey makes me think about the process I have been through in becoming mum to my son. In the early days, I was looking after someone else's child, a stranger who had experiences to which I had no access and limited knowledge. I was told about his likes and dislikes, his bedtime routine but what no one could tell me was who he was, what motivated him, how he saw the world. I did not know him. The journey to becoming his mum and him becoming my son has been a shift from not knowing to knowing the very core of his being. For Anna, I wonder if the involvement of others within the education system and her son's experience of school threatened this process by making her doubt what she was coming to know about her son.

In the same vein, Anna's journey has also involved a shift from a sense of 'not knowing' because she was not present in school:

" . . . they asked me in to shadow for a few days in order to support him, so I saw a lot of things that were happening that I didn't know . . . There was a chair that naughty children could sit on in front of everyone and used, in front of me she did this. I don't know what it was like when I wasn't there." (Line 248 to 252)

To her experience of home-schooling where she is fully present and does not make any reference to 'not knowing' instead she talks about the importance of 'knowing' in relation to her son's experience:

“ . . . I'm there in the background so I can see if he's getting stressed and if I need to, I'll step in and take him out . . . he just needs somebody there with him . . . because it does happen very quick, but I know the kinds of things that will set him off.” (Line 115 to 119)

“It took about 10 weeks before he started relaxing . . . knowing what to expect, getting to know everybody, the teacher knowing him. . .” (Line 128)

Anna refers to others as 'not knowing', *“the SENCO obviously did nothing, she didn't know what to do, she didn't suggest anything.”* (Line 51) Anna explores the relationship between knowing and understanding during the reconstruction of a meeting she had with an Educational Psychologist:

“ . . . he seemed to know a lot about attachment, he knew about home education, he knew a lot about it so maybe he understood the situation, he was really good.” (Line 430 to 432)

In this instance Anna has made a connection between knowing and understanding. Understanding is synonymous with being empathetic and supportive. Anna experiences a lack of understanding about her son's needs and gives a sense that she was alone and unsupported in her understanding of his needs:

“ . . . the teachers thought he was just being naughty on purpose, definitely . . . there’s no understanding about . . . refusal to follow instructions might be because he’s anxious. . . nobody understood that I think in the whole school.” (Line 270 to 278)

Knowing and understanding are aspects that Anna has identified as being fundamental in providing appropriate support, action and empathy. When knowing and understanding are evident, Anna’s experiences are positive. On the other hand, when Anna experiences ‘not knowing’ this evokes a sense of uncertainty, mistrust and panic.

Theme 3: The Weight of Expectation

In Anna’s story ‘The Weight of Expectation’ play a role in her experience of her son’s education. She talks about the expectation of others and the impact they had on her son’s behaviour in school.

“ . . . Why didn’t she just ignore it and let him keep his gloves on if it makes him feel better but he had to go on the time out chair for that. Not taking his gloves off. . . she did the register and he didn’t say anything. He didn’t used to like saying hello in front of people . . . so she put him on the time out chair for that and that was just non-violent things. So that wasn’t great, it made him much worse.” (Line 254 to 260)

Anna experiences the impact of these expectations with her son’s age in mind and gives her perception of the motives behind the reinforcement of those expectations.

“She was trying to break his will, I think she thought, impose her authority he’d start listening, it works for some other kids I’m sure but . . . he was only four and a half, it’s horrible thinking about it . . .” (Line 271 to 273),

Again, this paints an image of power, threat and control, particularly one where the imbalance of power is made greater by drawing attention to her son’s age at the time. With the mention of his age, there is the suggestion that she perceives an authoritarian approach to be horrendous.

In contrast, the expectations of Home-schooling are presented as different to that of mainstream schooling with a greater degree of flexibility and a shared responsibility.

“In home education groups they are less strict so if he doesn’t want to do something, they won’t usually force him to do it they’ll either ignore him or let me take him out. But with school there’s a lot more pressure to do what he was told.” (Line 140 to 143)

In addition to the expectations placed on her son, Anna bares the weight of expectation and responsibility on herself. The ultimate impact was on her job and her work place responsibilities.

“I was trying to work . . . and I kept being called home from work . . . almost every day, sometimes it was like 20 past 9 in the morning and I’d be on the way to work they phone to say you have to pick him up now.”
(Line 76 to 79)

Anna's story suggests that her expectations of being able to continue working following her adoption leave did not become a reality for her. She reflected on the lack of information provided on adoption training about schooling and the difficulties some children may face.

“. . . They never said to us be prepared that one of you might not be able to go back to work. . . I did three months and then they said he's only allowed one hour a day from January. I still remember finding out at work about that. And I couldn't really work after that any more. . .” (Line 451 to 460)

Anna speaks of the challenge in meeting what turn out to be either unsustainable or unrealistic expectations. There was a sense of loss in relation to her job and the resulting relocation but there was also a resolute acceptance of the situation.

Theme 4: Too Many People, Too Late.

Anna's experience of her son's education has involved a number of professionals. Anna talks in the beginning of wanting to get people involved to get more help, *“. . . [we] tried to get people to know we needed help . . .”* (Line 400) However, towards the end of her story she speaks of too many people being involved and gives a sense that it was overwhelming and unproductive.

*“. . . All sorts of people but I think it was too many people. . . Nothing ever got achieved and the meetings would all start 'say something positive about *son*', and we'd have to go round and it would take half*

an hour . . . we wanted to get to the problem . . . what are we going to do . . . Just such a waste of time the whole thing.” (Line 300 to 306)

Anna’s story about professionals is one of varying degrees of success. There are particular aspects of professional involvement that Anna speaks of that she perceived as helpful and some she identified as hindering the process. Time is a key factor which negatively impacts on her son’s experience: *“So all these things came in but it was way too late. So I think by then he got in such a bad pattern of behaviour, there was nothing you could do with him . . .”* (Line 58 to 60)

The role of professional responsibility is also highlighted as a complicating factor: “. . . [we were] referred to CAMHS, they rejected us at first . . . educational psychology rejected us at first. Each was saying we should have the other . . . it lasted for months, honestly.” (Line 52 to 55) Anna felt that nobody wanted anything to do with her son and their situation, that it was too much for them.

However, Anna does recognise the support and positive contribution of some professionals. Those professionals that were most helpful acted and were certain in their advice “. . . The adoption agency was brilliant, they would come to the meetings with us, they would be quite stern at times.” (Line 318) Anna speaks of the differences between professionals who were helpful and those that were not. She presents this difference in terms of knowledge and understanding, care and thoughtfulness. “. . . they did a really thoughtful, nice assessment. That’s the best one we had actually. . . .” (Line 311) However, in contrast “. . . She had nothing to

add . . . the report was just really vague, cut and paste, it didn't even mention adoption issues. . .It was so disappointing . . . she didn't even think about it, she didn't put any thought into it. . .” (Line 282 to 287)

Anna's story of 'Too Many People, Too Late' is one that is marred with both frustration and disappointment although there are also glimpses of support and care. While Anna sought help from professionals, too many professionals became counterproductive and intervention was often too late. There is a sense that when it worked well for Anna, the professionals demonstrated knowledge, understanding and consideration of their situation. However, the impact of the professionals involved, was minimal with very little change occurring for her son.

Summary of Anna's story

Anna's stories are reconstructed in a powerfully emotive way and tell of a journey that she and her family have been on. One that takes them from an unmanageable chaos that was damaging their family and involving too many professionals to a place where Anna has claimed control of her son's education, has reduced the number of professionals involved, arrived at a place of knowing and found that her son is much happier. Anna is uncertain of what the future holds and still feels the weight of expectation for her son to attend a regular educational setting.

5:2: Jane's Story

I met with Jane at her home in a suburban area of the north west of England. We sat at the table in her kitchen and using a narrative approach to the interview she shared her experience as an adoptive Mum through the co-construction of a number of stories.

Jane is a mother of twins; a boy and a girl who she adopted with her husband at 8 months old. At the time of the interview the children were in Year 1 at a local mainstream primary school. They had attended a local Nursery and then moved to the school Nursery before transitioning to Reception. Jane is a speech and language therapist while her husband is a teacher with leadership responsibilities.

Jane spoke positively about the process of adoption reporting, "We were lucky that we had a really, really, good social worker who was really experienced, who got us." They were clear that despite their professional experience, ". . .we wanted a family, not a job. . ."

Jane spoke highly of the foster carers who looked after the twins prior to their adoption describing them as "really experienced". Jane took 12 months adoption leave before the twins started Nursery. She described a range of emotions as they adjusted to the reality of family life:

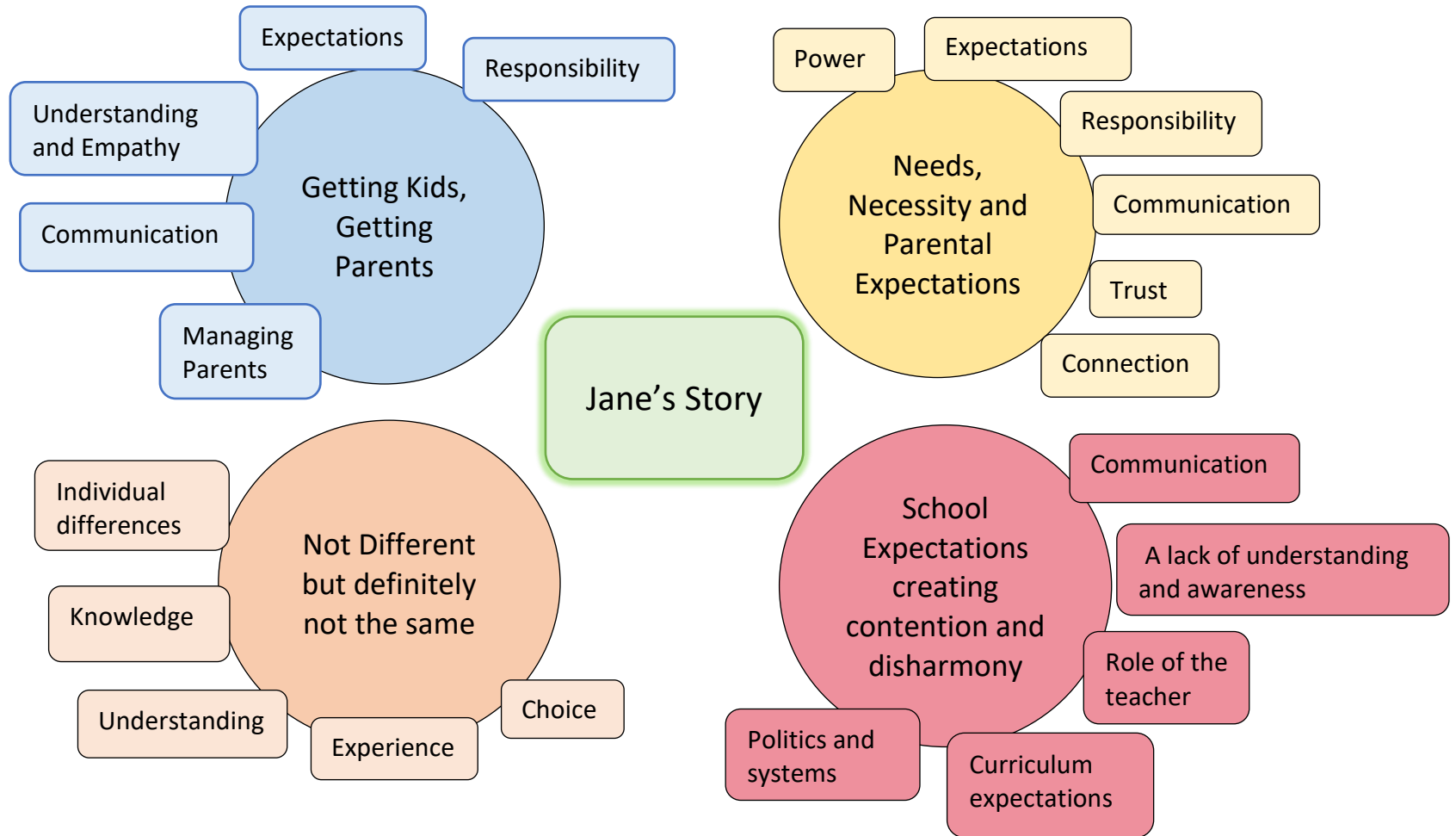
". . . To begin with, you're just getting through the day, it's like feed, bottles, nappy, feed, bottle, nappy . . . [laughter] and oh I need to eat and it's just oh god am I meant to make tea as well. . . it was just hard

sometimes. . . I was older, I was 42, I was physically and emotionally knackered . . .” (Line 106 to 112)

“ . . . It was amazing and . . . one of the daft things I remember, because they came in the winter, hanging out their baby vests . . . on the line for the first time and just crying because I’d waited so long to do that. . .”
(Line 114 to 116)

My interpretation of the remaining narrative highlighted four main themes that featured in Jane’s reconstruction of her experiences. A full thematic map of the four main themes and associated subthemes is detailed in Figure 2. Each main theme is then explored and presented in the subsequent subsections.

Figure 5:2: Full Thematic Map: Jane



Theme 1: Getting Kids, Getting Parents

Jane makes reference to understanding on a number of occasions, emphasising the importance to herself and her children through different stories. Jane uses the term 'got' and 'gets' several times which I have inferred to mean understand. She tells a specific story about the nursery teacher understanding her son,

“ . . . She got the things he liked and the things he didn't like. . . You're meant to encourage them to sit and write their name every morning . . . that was never going to happen in a million years . . . and she got that . . . ” (Line 408 to 411)

Jane talks about the importance of teachers understanding her and the difference this makes to her experience of her children's education.

“ . . . she just also got parents and I think that was the difference. . . she was willing to listen to me and my concerns. . . she got kids, but she also got parents ” (Line 407 to 408; 418)

In both quotes, Jane gives a sense that having a shared understanding and being listened to contributes to her and her son feeling valued and appreciated.

In contrast, Jane shares her experience of her child's education when she perceives there to be a lack of understanding from teachers.

“ . . . trying to explain to her the problems we are having with him at home. 'Oh, I don't see any of that in school. . . Do you think he could have an attachment disorder?' ” (Line 204 to 206)

Jane was horrified by this response which also confirmed that the teacher did not 'get' her son or their situation. This reconstruction gives a sense that there was a lack of empathy from the teacher and no shared understanding between Jane and the teacher. Jane reflected on the impact of asking this question:

"You just don't say that to an adoptive parent because that's the fear isn't it? You know you just don't do that. . . but she was just trying to give us a reason and almost like make it our problem not hers. . ." (Line 217 to 221)

Jane's reasoning for the teacher's response suggests that she felt that the teacher was passing the concerns back to her and apportioning blame to Jane as everything was all right in school.

Jane shares another experience where she gives a sense that the teacher does not 'get' her son. Talking about the difficulties getting her son to complete homework:

"If you want him to do it, you make that the motivator from school. . . she said, 'you know what I'll do is I'll show him some other children's books, so he can see what other children are doing' and I just went 'No! don't do that.' and left the building. . ." (Line 237 to 240)

In this extract, Jane talks of the challenge in being understood. In suggesting this solution, the teacher has demonstrated to Jane that she does not understand the

Reflection: Jane places great importance on the teacher 'getting' kids and 'getting' parents. For me this brings up something about being understood, recognised and valued. Reflecting on my own experience and wondering why it might be important to be recognised and valued as an adoptive parent. I want others to understand that my priorities are different. For me, there is an added dimension to being an adoptive parent that does not relate to a difference in parenting but relates to what my son has experienced and the ongoing affect.

reasons her son does not like doing homework. When recounting this event, there was a sense of frustration and despair from Jane that the teacher was not, in Jane's terms, 'getting' it.

Jane's story of 'Getting Kids, Getting Parents' is one that highlights the contrast in experience when a teacher 'get kids' and 'get parents' and when they do not. The teacher that 'got parents' made Jane feel listened to and valued and in 'getting' her son made her feel that her son was appreciated. In contrast, in the situations where school staff did not demonstrate understanding, Jane was left feeling dismissed and "livid" with a sense that the teacher did not know her son.

Theme 2: Needs, Necessity and Parental Expectations

Jane's story of 'Needs, Necessity and Parental Expectations' is one of responsibility, expectation and the challenges that come when communication between parents and school staff breaks down. It also speaks of parental needs not being met.

"She hid in the classroom because she didn't want to talk to us . . . you have to manage the parents as much as you have to manage the kids. . . You might not like talking to parents . . . I get that . . . But you can't hide in your class you've got to be there, it's not good enough." (Line 426 to 433)

This quote highlights Jane's expectation that the teacher should be responsible for

Reflection: Being the first year in school, parents are entrusting their children to school staff for the first time. There is also a sense of coming to terms with letting go and not being there to ensure your children are coping. I wonder if that is to a greater degree for adoptive parents as there could be a greater level of vulnerability and uncertainty about how they will manage and cope.

meeting the needs of parents in relation to their children's education. Additionally, the quote gives a sense that at reception age, parents come hand in hand with the children and are of equal consideration and value. Having access to the teacher and being able to communicate and feel heard is one need that Jane shares. Jane explains, *"That's all you need to say sometimes, 'you know she had a nightmare last night and she may be a bit sleepy.'"* (Line 424 to 425)

Jane summarises her need as a parent:

"I think that's why you warm to certain teachers because you get the feeling that they think your kid is brilliant . . . I'm not expecting every teacher to think my kid is the best thing ever, but I expect you to give me the impression that my child is the best thing ever [laughter] . . . and I don't care that you think he's a little shit." (Line 507 to 514)

This speaks of a need to feel that her children are valued and appreciated for who they are. There is a sense that this would give Jane peace of mind and help her to trust school staff to care for her children.

Jane's story of 'Needs, Necessity and Parental Expectations' highlights the importance of the home-school relationship for parental satisfaction. Throughout Jane's narrative, I get a sense that in her communication with the school, particularly when her experiences were not positive, she was searching for validation and action to put right the perceived wrongs. *"That was one of the things we raised, and after that she was on the door."* (Line 436 to 437) This suggests that

managing parents is about managing the expectations of parents, which makes me think about the balance of power between parents and school staff.

Theme 3: School Expectations Creating Contention and Disharmony

Jane's story of 'School Expectations Creating Contention and Disharmony' relates to the standards placed on her children by school and how they are communicated and managed by the staff. Jane talks of her frustrations when the expectations between school and home do not align.

*“. . . [son] came home and he said, 'I wrote sentences' and I said 'Oh that's amazing, *teacher* must have been so proud'. 'No because I didn't leave finger spaces.' . . ."* (Line 260 to 262)

There was a sense of despair when Jane was retelling this event and she spoke of going in to challenge the teacher about the lack of praise and recognition. This exert and Jane's actions could suggest that Jane does not feel the teacher is appreciating

Reflection: This reminds me of the times when there is a clash between the priorities we have as a family and the priorities of school and the pressure for my son to fit into school expectations is great. It is at these times I want school staff to appreciate and understand that in the grand scheme of his life so far, having handwriting that is too big or not meeting age related expectations for spelling is not something that should be making him feel less than.

the significance of her son writing sentences and what that means to them both.

This relates to that sense of the teacher 'not getting' her son.

In relation to her daughter, Jane speaks of a need for clear expectations, particularly during the transition from one year-group to the next.

“She just doesn’t quite know what’s expected of her . . . The teacher is really key. . . I don’t think its trauma, I don’t think its adoption . . . I think for her it’s just getting used to knowing what the rules are, knowing what is expected and then she will be fine.” (Line 292 to 301)

Jane does not see this as a need that is related to her daughter being adopted or her early experiences. Jane sees her daughter’s need to know what is expected of her in relation to her temperament and characteristics. Jane speaks of the importance and impact of the teacher and this being crucial for her children’s educational experience. However, she also recognises that some expectations are not within the teacher’s control:

“The fact that they’re learning joined up writing I think is absolutely frigging ridiculous. . . So that’s not the teachers’ fault, that’s the pressure from above and unless teachers as a body revolt against that, that’s part of the problem.” (Line 520 to 523)

In this, Jane considers expectations in relation to the political climate, and the impact on her children and her experiences of their education. Again, there is a misalignment between her expectations and curriculum expectations.

Jane’s story of ‘School Expectations Creating Contention and Disharmony’ is one of conflict between what she expects her children to be doing at school and what the education system is expecting of her children. However, while she does not agree with it, she accepts the reality of the situation, *“unless . . . you’re going to take your*

kids out of that system you have to go, 'this is the system'." (Line 519) Despite this, Jane highlights the importance of how these expectations are managed and communicated to her children. Jane states that the teacher is vital in this process and her children's experiences are very much dependent on the teacher.

Theme 4: Not Different but Definitely Not the Same

Jane's story is one that highlights individual differences and characteristics as well as adoption. Jane talks about adoption and the need for schools to understand and take into account early experiences. However, she does not feel that this applies to her children as any early life trauma was limited. Jane indicates that this places them in a position in which their children do not need anything different to their peers:

"... they haven't got attachment issues. It makes a massive difference. I think we were really lucky, they were removed at birth, they had a really strong attachment to their foster carers..." (Line 100 to 102)

However, Jane believes that attachment and trauma is not just relevant to adopted children *"... I think it's about so many kids that I just think it's about making it as normal as you know about autism. . . Changing the ethos of the school accordingly."* (Line 486 to 488)

When talking about her experiences of her children's education, Jane refers to their characteristics, individual differences and interests. She gives a sense that it is this that should be appreciated, considered and understood rather than them being

adopted, *“It’s not about making allowances for them or anything like that it’s just their history and part of who they are.”* (Line 581) In this quote, Jane implies that being adopted is important as it is part of who they are but for her children it does not distinguish them from their peers. *“They go into school no worse or no better than other kids that aren’t adopted who are wailing and gnashing teeth far more than my two are.”* (Line 402 to 404)

However, Jane recognises that it could be a very different story if her son did not behave as well as he does in school:

*“. . . if *son* behaves in school in the way he behaves at home we’d be having massive issues in school. . . he would have been excluded, because I think the tolerance in nice middle-class schools for tricky behaviour is low.”* (Line 460 to 463)

Jane explains that having a greater choice of educational placement means that if this situation did arise, she would have the advantage of moving him.

“I think being able to choose, that is very important, and who knows when they get to secondary school, that will become more important to have that choice.” (Line 481 to 483)

Jane positions herself in her stories as being secure in her knowledge of her children and those subjects that are associated with adoption such as trauma and attachment.

*“I said it’s fine for me and *husband* because we are sound enough in our clinical opinions, and know enough about it to know that’s not the case, but for another adoptive parent that could send them over the edge.” (Line 215 to 217)*

Jane recognises that her experiences may be different to that of other adoptive parents. Using the term ‘clinical opinions’ suggests that this difference relates to professional knowledge and experience. In doing so, Jane implies that they may be in a different position to other adoptive parents. However, Jane also talks about acquiring knowledge:

“. . . you often end up being better informed than the professionals because it’s motivating to you . . . to read background stuff and to read this, and that says that so deal with it. . .” (Line 455 to 458)

Jane concluded her story about ‘Not Different, but Definitely Not the Same’ by explaining, *“I mean I worry about education and the stresses it puts on kids but not in terms of adoption. What will be, will be, wont it.” (Line 603 to 604)*

Summary of Jane’s Story

For Jane, having staff in school that understand her and her children is important. In understanding, Jane describes situations where staff ‘get’ her and other parents and in doing so, she perceives them to manage parents well. However, where there is no understanding or empathy Jane talks of a situation where her needs are not met and the expectations, she holds for her children are not aligned with school

expectations. However, it is the management and communication of expectations that affects her perception of the teacher and their relationship. Throughout Jane's narrative, she talks of a need for school staff to be trained and have an understanding of trauma and attachment but not specifically in relation to adopted children. Jane feels lucky that her children's early experiences are limited to in utero and as a result do not need anything different to that of their peers. However, she does recognise that other adopted children may need something additional to and different from other children.

5:3 Kevin's Story

I met with Kevin at his home in a suburban area in the North West of England. We sat at the table in his kitchen while he shared his experiences of adoption and his children's schooling through the narrative co-constructed during our conversation.

Kevin is father to two boys, birth siblings, who he adopted with his partner 5 years ago. At the time of the interview their eldest son was in Year 4 at a residential special school for children with severe social, emotional and mental health difficulties. While their youngest was in Year 2 at the local mainstream primary school. Kevin and his partner both work in the business sector.

After clarifying the ages of his children and when they adopted them, Kevin took the lead and commenced the interview with "Do you want me to tell you our story?"

He set the scene:

“. . . they had very different lives, very different kind of backgrounds . . . the older child . . . had witnessed extreme trauma . . . has got real attachment issues. The younger child was removed at 4 days old from his birth mum and was only with one set of foster carers. The older child was with lots of different foster carers with different standards of foster care . . .” (Line 3 to 7)

Kevin spoke of the journey they had been on initiated by the ill-informed social workers who assured Kevin and his partner that the boys *“. . . didn't have any*

attachment issues or behavioural issues. . .” (Line 9) and specifically in relation to their eldest son “. . . he won’t remember the things that have happened to him.” (Line 16) Kevin reflected “. . . we felt quite naïve because we kind of took the social workers on face value. . .some of the things they’ve said now has made us quite cross. . . it’s just massively ignorant. . .” (Line 14 to 15)

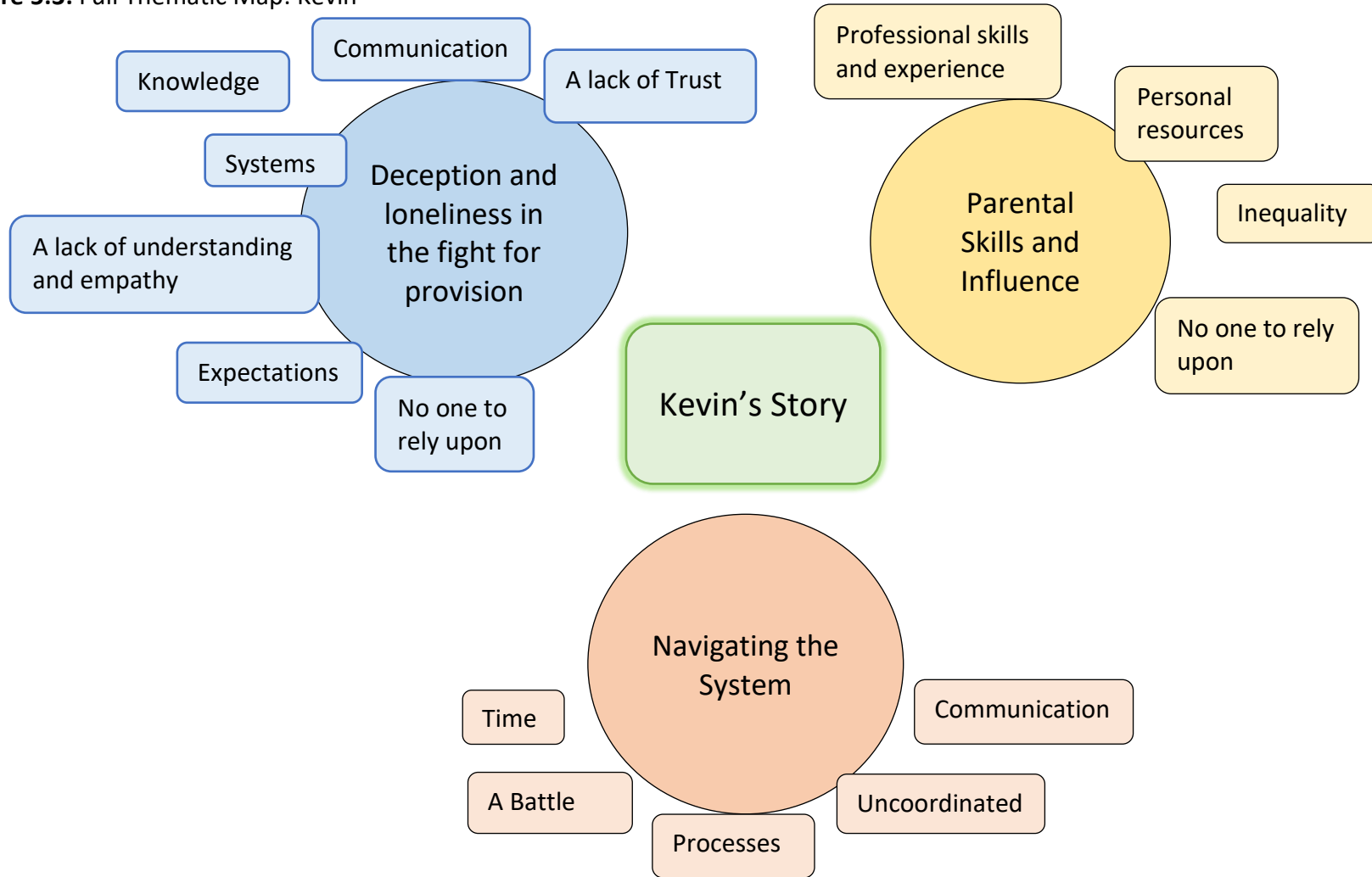
Almost to justify his point and emphasise the polarity of the social worker’s words compared with their experience, Kevin added:

“. . . he’s just had an assessment actually where basically the gist of it was, he has very strong disorganised attachment disorder. There’s extensive trauma and in effective he’s kind of frozen . . . just before two years old where he witnessed a lot of very extreme things and suffered extreme neglect. . .we found it very challenging at home. . . dealing with temper tantrums. . . very, very controlling behaviour” (Line 10 to 14; 18 to 19)

Kevin’s eldest son attended a mainstream primary school where the challenges they faced at home did not present at school until Year 1.

My interpretation of the remaining narrative highlighted three main themes that featured in Kevin’s reconstruction of his experiences. A full thematic map of the three main themes and associated subthemes is detailed in Figure 3. Each main theme is then explored and presented in the subsequent subsections.

Figure 5:3: Full Thematic Map: Kevin



Theme 1: Deception and Loneliness in the Fight for Provision

Kevin's story starts with being misinformed by the social workers about his eldest son's needs and the lasting effect of his early experiences. While there were a number of professionals involved with Kevin's older son, Kevin gives the sense that he felt let down by the professionals involved:

“. . . people . . . give you false hope and you know, 'we're going to turn this around' and because people say it and then it doesn't happen you stop believing it . . .” (Line 405 to 407)

This suggests that there was a lack of trust and faith in the professionals with a number of services saying things that turn out not to be true. Throughout Kevin's narrative, he talks about the importance of professionals being blunt and honest.

“. . . they're so worried about upsetting you and partly because . . . they do care, that you get this kind of very slightly passive aggressive going around the houses . . . just be blunt, just say so this is what has happened today, give a factual account . . . I just need to know where we're at . . . and then you can do the positive stuff but first I need to know what happened. . .” (Line 148 to 153)

While Kevin recognises that the staff in school have good intentions, he often feels that he is not given all the facts, which is likely to leave him feeling deceived.

“So at . . . every parents evening . . . he's doing really well, he's a lovely boy . . . But . . . at the end of the year, I get his school report and it's like he's behind in every single thing apart from PE and . . . I wish I'd known.”

(Line 254 to 257)

The need to know and be well informed is important to Kevin and suggests that the professionals involved are not contributing towards this. Throughout Kevin's narrative, he gives a sense that the only person he can rely upon is himself:

“ . . . 100% driven by me . . . it was like a part time job . . . I went on every single adoption training course I bloody could, I read every bloody book I could read, you know it was insane.” (Line 198 to 202)

Kevin talks about being on his own navigating and negotiating the systems needed to get the right support and provision for his eldest son, *“ . . . basically you're just fighting on your own, it's absolutely crazy.”* (Line 87) The word 'fighting' conjures an image of conflict and of a struggle to break through and overcome obstacles in his way.

Kevin talks about the lack of understanding and empathy from the professionals involved and how this contributed to a sense of loneliness:

“ . . . no one really quite understanding . . . just how challenging he was on a day to day basis . . . no one saying 'how are you?' . . . 'Are you alright?' . . . no one at school saying that. . . ” (Line 364 to 366)

Kevin reconstructs an event that demonstrates a sense of being on his own, of a lack of support and empathy from professionals.

“ . . . they kept on expecting us to do home schooling at short notice . . . and we were dead flexible . . . we kept on doing it . . . it went on for weeks . . . and then one day I just . . . said . . . I won't be able to do home school today . . . they looked a bit shocked . . . she said that . . . if they

couldn't contact you . . . they would have to call social services . . . I was so gobsmacked because I'd been incredibly constructive . . ." (Line 126 to 137)

The lack of support from school staff and the sense that there is no one to rely upon appears to be related to difficulties in communication and not being well informed by professionals. However, Kevin does recognise that *" . . . if you find the right support then there is some amazing people there who kind of help and provide guidance. . ."* (Line 110) However, despite this, Kevin feels *" . . . everything is driven by the parents. . ."* (Line 108) with *" . . . no one championing, going like 'right hold on, what are we doing here?'"* (Line 428) He explained the importance of working with people that understand; *"I think if they showed us more empathy then it would have felt less of a lonely existence. . ."* (Line 304)

Theme 2: Parental Skills and Influence

Kevin's story considers the role of his professional skills and influence in his battle to get the right support and provision for his eldest son.

" . . . if I didn't have those skills, and I didn't work part time it would have ended up in disruption and I'm dead proud of myself for doing it . . . but I think a lot of parents would have just gone, I can't cope and it would have disrupted and actually that's the worst thing for him. . ." (Line 331 to 334)

Kevin suggests that it was necessary to have the experience and skills developed through his profession in order for him to be able to navigate the systems, be

emotionally resilient and liaise with the professionals involved. *"I think I almost compartmentalised it and saw it like a project, a work project . . ."* (Line 342)

Without his skills, experience and the ability to approach the challenge in 'work mode', Kevin believes that they would have experienced adoption disruption. This again gives a sense that Kevin was very much the driving force in the process with success or failure being dependent on his ability to manage. Kevin speaks of the expectation and pressure placed upon him:

". . . they'd mention at the drop of a hat . . . so the PRU finished at 2 o'clock and the resourced provision finished at 2 o'clock and your like . . . Oh God, I've got a job . . . and the job isn't just . . . about the money. . . it was the only time where I was able to switch off . . . I'd already gone part time." (Line 360 to 364)

Being able to draw upon available resources and be in a position of employment that allows Kevin to be flexible and adapt to the requirements of alternative educational provision is also a vital component in his ability to support his son. Despite this, there is a sense that Kevin's job and his time to be someone other than 'Dad', is threatened under the pressure to be available at short notice. The idea that Kevin's job was the *". . . only time where I was able to switch off . . ."* conjures up an image of Kevin being consumed by the care of his eldest son and the battle to get appropriate support and provision.

". . . you're like a full time carer for [older son]. . . there's no understanding from the school. . . you don't have the child care that everyone else has because you can't place him in an after-school club."

(Line 356 to 359)

However, Kevin reflects on the benefits of his position and thinks about other adoptive parents that may not be in the same position, “. . . *if I was a single parent . . . adopter working full time, you’d be absolutely, pardon my language, fucked, it’s immoral, it’s changed my politics to be honest . . .*” (Line 424) In this statement, Kevin implies that the successful negotiation of the educational systems and processes is very much dependent on the personal resources of adoptive parents. Kevin, sees much inequality in this to the extent it has changed his political views. He emphasises this point:

“When I’d send an email from . . . my personal [company] account, as opposed to my home email account, the speed at which it got answered . . . it’s nuts it shouldn’t be that way.” (Line 421 to 424)

Kevin’s story is one where he draws upon his own personal resources to fight for the right support and provision for his son. He recognises advantages in having the professional skills and flexibility to be able to approach it like a part time job, both practically and emotionally. However, Kevin sees great inequality in a system where he feels the outcome for his son and his family is down to his drive, skills and personal resources.

Theme 3: Navigating the System

Kevin tells a story about the systems that he has had to negotiate in his experience of his son’s education. He talks of time being a significant factor in his experience with actions and decisions taking a long time to implement: *“so then it kind of*

carried on for a long time . . . where . . . we were communicating lots with school and school was communicating lots with us.” (Line 30 to 32)

In addition to this, Kevin talks of the number of professionals involved and of having to tell their story time and time again; *“ . . . having to go through every expert . . . it felt like you’re having to go through it all over again . . . not joined up.” (Line 367)*

Kevin gives a sense that having to do this, was not only time consuming but also had an emotional impact. Kevin explained that through his experience he found *“ . . . there’s no infrastructure around, it’s like odd uncoordinated bodies. . .” (Line 338)*

When professionals did come together, Kevin found that the system was too slow:

“ . . . it just took forever to get the people in the room to make the decision. And the panel would meet and then one of them would ask a question which was actually already in the information, but they’ve not necessarily come across it and that would delay it again. . .” (Line 317 to 320)

The sense of frustration Kevin conveys adds to the already challenging situation caring for their son. Kevin talks of getting to a point of desperation and having to resort to

“ . . . mentioning safeguarding risks from [older son] to [younger son] and it was talk of adoption disruption. It shouldn’t be that way, you’re having to say those things to get anyone to move. . .” (Line 391 to 393)

Despite mentioning safeguarding risks and adoption disruption, Kevin still felt that the professionals did not act quickly enough. *“The system is way too slow, so for [older son], for me applying to the [residential school] took six months. . .”* (Line 309)

Kevin talks of his anger about the whole situation:

“. . . it really makes me annoyed that the system can't cope, I don't understand why there isn't . . . like, 'ok we've got a kid with an attachment disorder so here's the potential check list for the kind of things you should be doing at school' . . . and if this doesn't work out this is what we're going to do next.” (Line 335 to 338)

Kevin gives the impression that the systems he encountered added to the challenges they already faced caring for their son. He imagines a situation where the system drives a process rather than being driven by the parents. Kevin talks about time, uncoordinated bodies and the lengths they had to go to in their battle with the systems.

“So it has had a real impact on us and . . . we're kind of left reeling but we're starting to . . . breath again. . . and starting a life.” (Line 369 to 370)

Summary of Kevin's Story

Kevin's stories describe a situation where a lack of trust, poor communication and slow processes meant that Kevin felt the need to draw upon his own professional and personal resources in his search for appropriate provision for his son. This search is portrayed as a battle against systems and processes that he was only able to win due to his status and professional experience. Kevin sees great inequality in

this and feels for those adoptive parents that do not have the same resources to draw upon.

5: 4 Final Analysis

The following section brings together the themes from each participant to look at how they may be related or different. Although I have addressed each narrative in turn to fit with my epistemological and ontological position that experience and knowledge is individual, I feel that it would be beneficial to consider if the individual experiences of each participant have any commonality across participants. This adds a depth to the analysis and summarises the findings in order to consider *'How can these stories inform practice for schools and Educational Psychologists?'*

In order to facilitate this, I considered the themes from each participant together, constructed links between similar themes identified across the participants and rejected those that remained individual to each participant. I have represented this process in figures 5:4, 5:5 and 5:6. Here, through my interpretation, I have drawn together individual themes from each participant to create the related themes of 'Expectations', 'Knowing and Understanding' and 'Support'. Related Theme 1 'Expectations' was identified through the common use of the term throughout the themes and subthemes for each participant. Related Theme 2 'knowing and understanding' was also recognised across the participants' narratives and was referenced through the thematic terms 'knowing', 'knowledge', 'understanding', 'awareness', 'empathy' and 'perception'. Related Theme 3 'Support' was recognised through reference to the participants experiences of the support they received from

school staff and other professionals reconstructed through their narratives. The related themes understood through my interpretation of the participants' narratives are considered below in more detail.

Figure 5:4: Related Theme 1

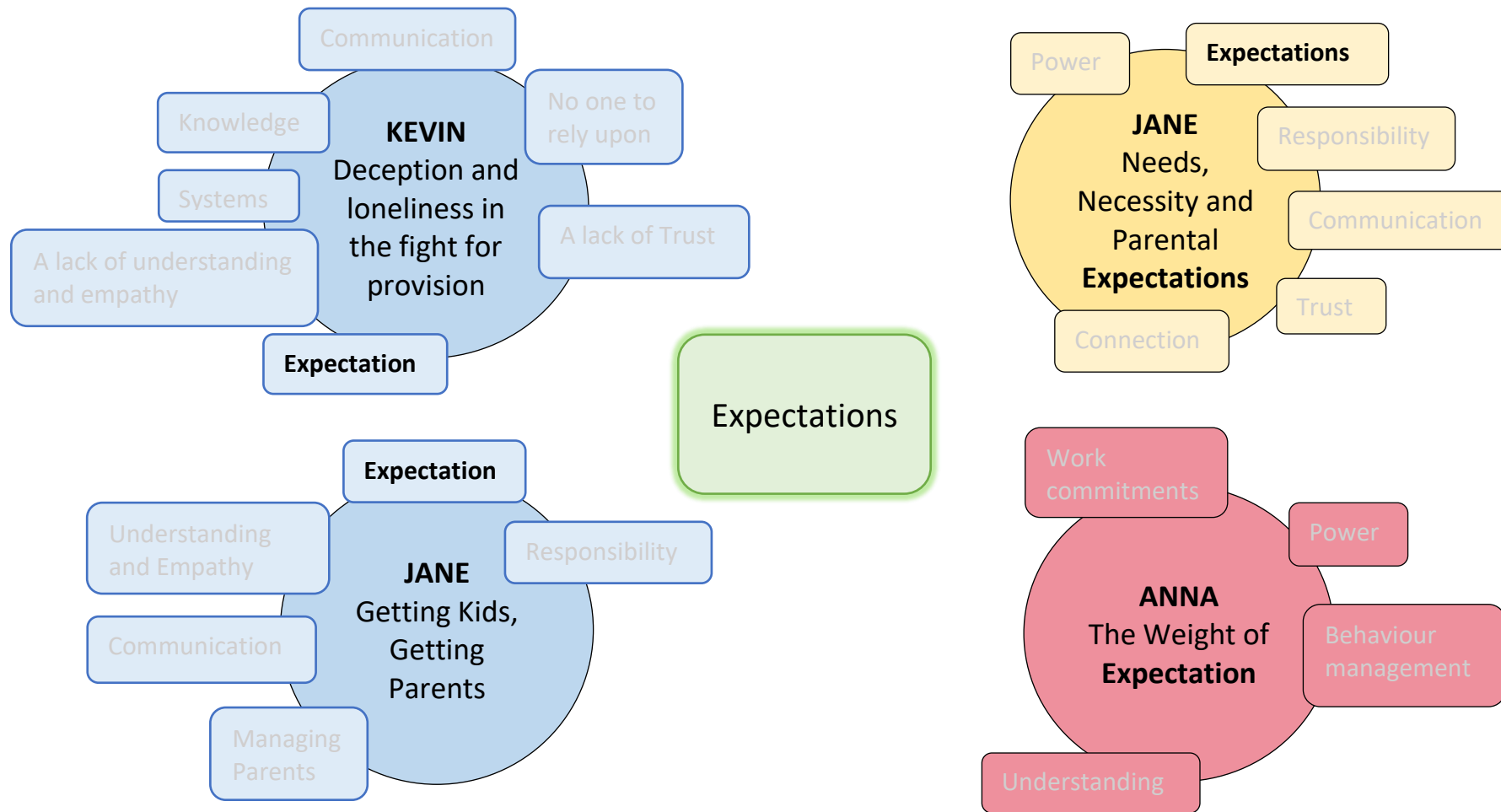


Figure 6:1 illustrates how the related theme 'Expectations' has been extrapolated from the individual thematic analyses for each participant.

Figure 5:5: Related Theme 2

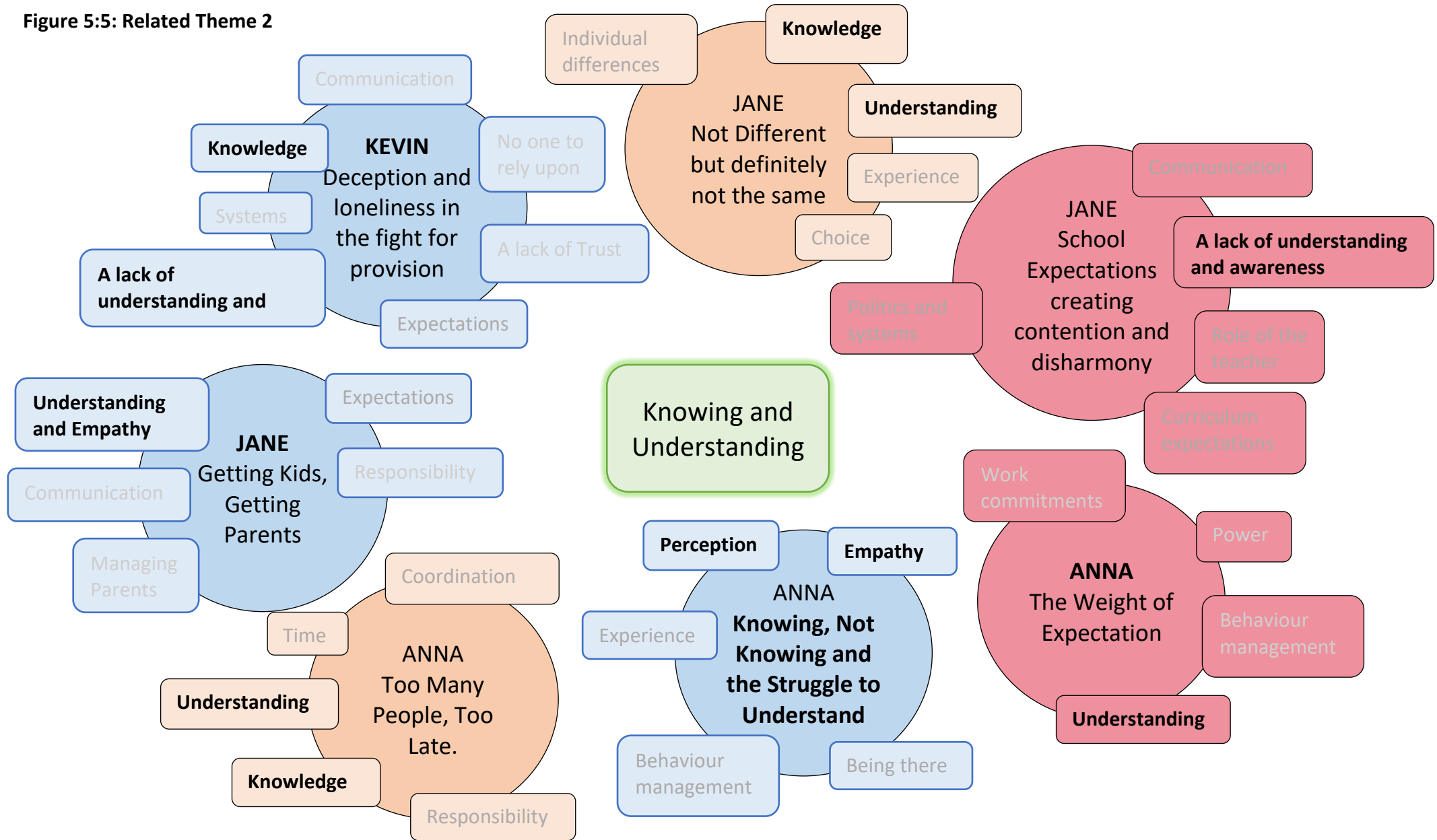


Figure 6:2 illustrates how the related theme 'Knowing and Understanding' has been extrapolated from the individual thematic analyses for each participant.

Figure 5:6 Related Theme 3

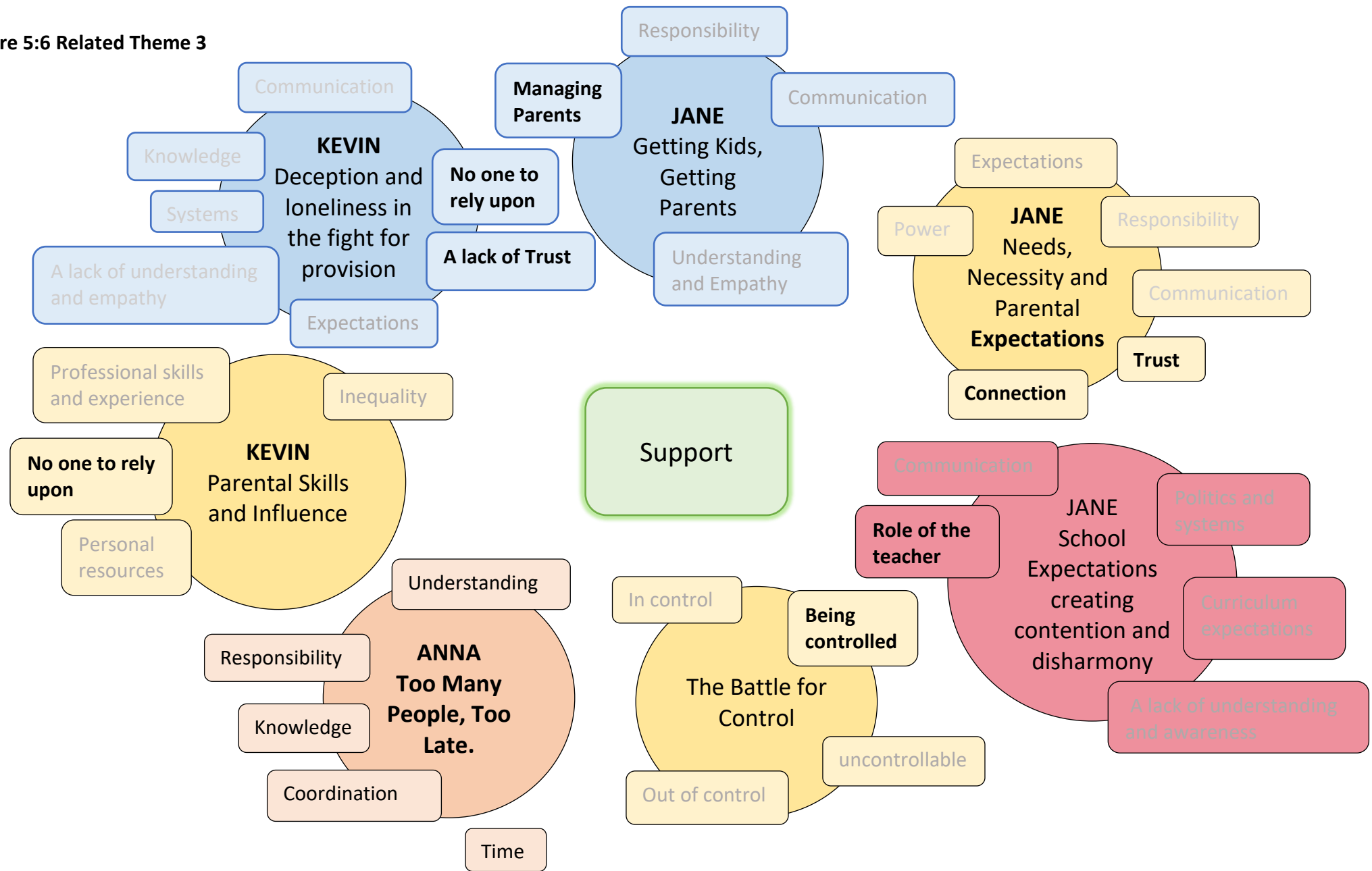


Figure 6:3 illustrates how the related theme 'Support' has been extrapolated from the individual thematic analyses for each participant.

Expectations (Figure 5:4)

Anna and Jane talk about the expectations placed on their children. Anna talks about the unnecessary demands placed on her son to conform. She suggests that these demands did not consider her son and his needs but were about the teacher's authority and control. Anna provides a comparison with the home education group's more relaxed expectations, describing a positive difference in her son's presentation and experience as a result. Jane speaks about curriculum expectations and how they do not align with her expectations of her son given his age and lack of confidence in relation to reading and writing. She shares her frustrations about how these expectations and demands are communicated to her son. The experiences of both participants suggest that demands and expectations in these instances were not suitably adjusted in relation to the children's needs.

Anna and Kevin talk about the expectations placed on them from school staff. Both participants speak about the pressure and impact on their jobs. They talk about the expectation for them to be at school to collect their children as and when the school demand. In Anna's experience, this could be on her way to work just after dropping her son at school. Kevin talked about one instance where he was not available to collect his son. He spoke of the threats from school to contact social care and gave a sense that he felt let and down and betrayed by the school.

Knowing and Understanding (Figure 5:5)

Knowing and understanding both feature in the narratives of all three participants in different ways. For Anna and Kevin, it is important that they have a sense of

knowing. However, where Kevin talks about his knowledge being limited by others not being open and honest about what was happening at school with his sons, Anna seems to go through a process of coming to know through her experience and taking control of her son's education. Anna's experience of not knowing how to help the school in relation to her son's behaviour, relates to her not being there. Anna states that she thought the school and professionals would know what to do but they did not.

All three participants speak about the lack of understanding and empathy school staff have for their children and their situation. Kevin was told school staff had empathy for his situation but only after his son had left the school, which, for him was too late. He states that it would have been a less lonely existence if he had been shown some empathy. Anna talks about the difference it makes when professionals know about adoption and home schooling; they seem to have a better understanding and can empathise. For Anna, I got the sense that the processing of coming to know her son was being threatened and interrupted by the situation at school and the stress she felt with the communication and expectations from school staff. I also wonder if the experiences of school staff and the understanding of other people challenged her notion of her son. Kevin speaks of the impact of stress on the family and states that if experiences at school are not good, then this has the potential to disrupt the adoption.

Jane talks about the difference between school staff 'getting' children and parents and not 'getting' them. In this instance, I recognise 'getting' to mean understanding.

When school staff understood her son and understood her needs as a parent, her experience of her children's education was much more positive.

Support (Figure 5:6)

Anna and Kevin also talk about needing someone to champion, coordinate and manage the situation for their children in school. Both Anna and Kevin sought the support and help from a range of professionals. Anna states that she wanted people to know they needed help. However, for Anna, having too many people involved allowed opportunity for people to evade responsibility. As a result, Anna felt she was being passed from one professional to another with no one wanting to work directly with her son. Anna saw no significant impact of their involvement; the situation for her and her son did not improve. Anna felt she had no choice but to quit her job and home school her son. Kevin spoke about having to do it all himself and describes his experiences of his son's education as a part time job. He felt that he was doing everything, driving it all. Kevin spoke of utilising his professional experience and skills and his contacts to manage and move things forward in the search for appropriate provision.

Jane talks about the availability of staff and the need for her to be listened to, supported and validated in her expectations of school. When this was not available, her relationship with school staff broke down. Kevin talks about trusting professionals to be honest in the information they share and would just like them to get to the point and be blunt. Anna shares this view, explaining that going around

the houses talking about the positives is a waste of time; she just needs to know what the issues are.

Anna and Kevin spoke about their lack of options with childcare due to the needs of their children. Neither participant was able to turn to family or other childcare facilities. This added to the pressure and threat they felt to their jobs under the expectations from school. Kevin explained that no one quite understood the impact on them as parents not having anyone to provide support or respite when their son was expected to be at home so much.

Time was a recurring factor in Anna and Kevin's experiences with systems and processes affecting the length of time it took for decisions to be made. For Anna, this meant that support was often too late for any change to have an effect.

Jane spoke of not needing anything different to other children but imagined that if her son behaved in school the same way as he does at home, then they would have problems, as "tolerance for challenging behaviour is low in middle class schools". Additionally, she spoke about waiting to see how her son got on but imagined she would have a battle if in the future he needed anything else. I got the sense from all three participants that they felt they had to fight for support and battle to overcome systemic and process driven obstacles.

However, all three participants spoke about the glimmers of brilliance they encountered in some of the professionals that passed through their stories. For Anna it was the thoughtful and meaningful report that demonstrated that someone

understood her son and the challenges they faced. It was also the professional that challenged the school on her behalf. For Kevin it was those professionals that cared about his son, that wanted to do their best for him, those that were honest and responded to his concerns. For Jane it was the school staff that gave her time, understood her concerns, 'got' her son and inspired him to learn.

Summary

Jane, Anna and Kevin have had very different experiences of their children's education. They shared their experiences through a co-constructed narrative. Thematic analysis was used to interpret each narrative. Through this interpretation, a number of themes have been highlighted for each participant and represented as stories. While these themes are individual to each participant, a degree of relatedness was noted during the analysis. Looking across the participants' stories, the themes 'expectations', 'knowing and understanding' and 'support' have been recognised within Jane, Anna and Kevin's narratives. While the participants constructed these themes in different ways, they offer information that speaks to the role of school staff and educational psychologists in adoptive parents' experiences of their child's education. Jane, Anna and Kevin speak about the need for knowledgeable, understanding professionals who are honest and purposeful in their communication. Additionally, they highlight the need for professionals to be aware of the impact of their expectations on adoptive parents and their children and show empathy and understanding of their situation. Having a professional to take control and lead communication and provision was missing in both Anna's and

Kevin's experiences. As a result, in different ways they both took that lead and control in their child's education.

Chapter 6: Discussion

This section addresses the findings from this study in relation to the research questions and existing literature concerning adoptive parents' experiences of their child's education.

What are the stories adoptive parents tell of their child's education?

Anna, Jane and Kevin had very different experiences of their child(ren)'s education and told their stories in different ways with a different focus. Kevin told his story from beginning to end and then was open to questions and a more conversational dialogue. Anna was reserved in her approach handing over the lead and responding to open ended questions. Jane was more forthcoming in her experiences and opinions and the dialogue was well balanced.

My role in the interviews changed as I adapted to the individual dynamics of each interaction. The differences in the interactions between myself and the participants produced very different co-constructed narratives. Through my interpretation of these narratives different themes have been presented to reflect each participant's story. As such the subsequent discussion will be structured to reflect the process of analysis with the stories for each participant presented in turn concluding in discussion around the final analysis. I will consider what these stories mean for each participant and their children and then finally, what they mean for school staff and Educational Psychology practice.

6: 1 Anna's Story

What does Anna's story mean for her as an adoptive parent?

Control is a theme that runs throughout Anna's story and is synonymous with power and authority. Anna gives an insight into what control might mean for her when she states, "*. . . I'd have to do what they tell me . . . I'd be controlled by them . . . I wouldn't be able to do what I wanted. . .*" Until this point in the narrative, Anna speaks about how control is needed in order that others around her are able to cope. In this quote, Anna speaks of control in relation to her need to have choices and autonomy in the education of her son. The fear she expresses when thinking about her son returning to mainstream schooling appears to be for herself and suggests that her prior experiences were one where she perceived things to be done too her by professionals, rather than with her. In relation to this, Billington et al (2000) found that successful interactions between professionals and parents involved sharing experience and expertise and an acknowledgement of the power dynamic. This quote from the co-constructed narrative gives the impression that Anna may have perceived herself not to have a voice in the decisions made about her son thus constructing an imbalance of power and a reason for Anna to reclaim power and control.

Anna also speaks to the theme 'weight of expectation' in the co-construction of events related to having to be available as and when required. Anna explains, "*. . . sometimes it was like 20 past 9 in the morning and I'd be on the way to work, they'd phone to say you have to pick him up now.*" Anna reconstructs the moment her son was only allowed in school one hour a day, realising that she would not be able to

work anymore. Selwyn et al (2015) have found that a number of adoptive parents who faced challenges in the parenting of their children suffered the loss of their jobs. However, they identified that it related to difficulties at home managing the distress of their child rather than related to school expectations. In Anna's narrative, she talks about her son's time in school as feeling unmanageable. Cooper and Johnson (2007) in their research have also recognised the loss and grief that many adoptive parents felt parenting a child with extreme emotional distress. Like Anna, they found that this loss related to employment and finances but also affected friendships and self-worth.

In the co-constructed narrative Anna talks about her perception of the school staff as lacking of control over her son and there is some suggestion that this is associated with their not knowing, *"I wanted them to tell me what to do or you know I thought they'd know what to do but they didn't. . ."* This relates to the theme 'knowing, not knowing and the struggle to understand' and not only speaks of Anna's perception of school staff not knowing but also of the interpretation of Anna as being in a position of not knowing as she expresses a desire for *". . . them to tell me what to do. . ."* I wonder if this sense of not knowing relates to the power imbalance reconstructed under the theme 'control'. Anna's explicit narrative of control and the interpretation of her journey from a position of not knowing to knowing ending in her control over her son's education speaks to the popular phrase, 'knowledge is power'. Research speaks of the knowledge and expertise that adoptive parents can bring to the education of their children (Lyons, 2011; Langton and Boy, 2017). However, this is not reflected in the co-construction of Anna's experiences; she

speaks about not wanting to inform school staff about the best way of managing her son. Studies have shown that those parents who spoke about offering to inform school staff about issues related to adoption and their children, were confident in their knowledge seeing themselves as experts (Lyons, 2016). Throughout the narrative, there is a sense that in the beginning Anna is not confident in her knowledge. Furthermore, the research highlights a reluctance for schools to accept the advice and expertise of parents (Selwyn et al, 2015). I wonder whether this also relates to power and control in the dynamic of the parent-teacher relationship and the roles each plays in the lives of the children. Alternatively, Russell and Granville (2005) found that many parents viewed home and school as distinct, not seeing their role as one that should inform school staff about the education and management of their children. In Anna's reconstruction of her experiences there is a sense that she felt powerless to give school staff the knowledge they needed, as she was not present in school.

Anna also speaks of not knowing her son was going to have the difficulties he did at school following a relatively settled period in Nursery. Anna is not alone in this, supportive findings by Selwyn et al (2015) have suggested that some adoptive parents experience a lack of understanding in relation to their children and their experiences. In relation to Anna, this was at the beginning of her journey with her ultimately being in a position of knowing. The adoptive parents in the study by Selwyn et al (2015) were in the later stages of their journey and had experienced adoption disruption where their child was no longer living with them. Anna's experiences of her son's education reconstructed in the narrative could be seen as

barriers in the process of coming to know her son. The first few years of someone else's child becoming your own is an emotional, intensive and challenging time without the impact of difficulties at school. Anna's doubts in knowing may have been further exacerbated by other people's judgements and assessments of her son.

Anna reflects on the involvement of different professionals in the education of her son under the theme of 'Too Many People, Too Late'. In the beginning, Anna was keen to get services and professionals involved, wanting people to know they needed help. However, ultimately Anna felt that there were too many people involved and she perceived this to be counterproductive. Anna paints a picture of large meetings that were conducted in her presence but in which she had little control or say about the structure and process. Again, there is a sense that there is a lack of collaboration with a focus on systems and processes that does not appear to meet their needs as a family. Anna specifically mentions an event where she experiences two services passing responsibility for her son's case back and forth, leaving Anna feeling rejected. Previous research has shown that some adopted parents can feel lonely and frustrated in their search for appropriate provision and support (Selwyn et al, 2015). Anna's story can be understood to be a frustration with systemic processes and expectations that did not meet their needs as a family. In the end, she states that they had no choice but to home educate her son as the provision she felt he needed was not available. For Anna it was important that professionals had an understanding about adoption, attachment and their individual situation. Current literature states that parents will value staff who get to know them and their individual situation, in addition to having knowledge about adoption,

attachment and trauma (Langton and Boy, 2017). This level of empathy has been shown to improve relationships between parents and school staff (Cooper and Johnson, 2007).

What does Anna's story mean for her son as a child adopted from care?

Throughout Anna's story, she speaks of her son as being different, often extreme in his presentation and of how he challenges expectations, not fitting into the experiences of the professionals involved. In 'The Battle for Control', Anna talks about control being important to her son. She explains that due to his early life experiences of repeated separation from primary caregivers, "*. . . a lot of fighting and arguing. . .*" he did not know what was going to happen to him from one moment to the next. Anna describes this experience as being out of control and implicitly uncontrollable for her son. Anna theorises that this is the underlying reason for his emotional distress and need to take control in school. Interestingly, Bowlby's (1969) theory of Internal Working Models (IWM) of attachment suggests that mental representations of attachment are developed throughout early experiences. The IWMs inform and influence understanding of relationships, emotional regulation, perception and social and cognitive function (Pace and Zavattini, 2010). In addition, Barone and Lionetti (2011) note that late-adopted children (adopted after the age of one) have already formed IWMs of attachment from their previous relationships, many of these children displaying insecure or disorganised attachments. The literature has also noted that adoption can help revise insecure and disorganised attachments for some children (Pace and Zavattini, 2010). In the process of adjusting to his adoption, Anna's son may not have been

given sufficient time for his IWM to be revised before being placed in an environment which he perceived to be unsafe thus reverting to primal behaviours associated with preservation and survival. Anna describes her son's behaviour at school as being aggressive and unmanageable with staff not being able to do anything with him. *"He'd just cause chaos in that school . . . he was in control of them all . . . he destroyed the school, he was only 4."* This quote is powerfully emotive but gives the impression that the situation was her son's making with the repetitive framing of her son as being the cause. This is at odds with Anna's understanding of her son's early life experiences and the impact this was continuing to have on his emotional regulation and management. Anna talks about the management of her son in school and the understanding she perceives staff to have about the function of his behaviours. The whole school approach of using a 'naughty chair' as part of the behaviour management policy was something that Anna was not initially aware of and the thought of this being used was incomprehensible. In addition to this, under the theme of 'The Weight of Expectation' Anna talks about her experience of supporting her son in the classroom and witnessing the unnecessary expectations being placed on him. She talks about her perception of the extreme consequences for small issues and eludes to a sense she felt of a lack of empathy and understanding of the teacher. *"He didn't use to like saying hello to people . . . so she put him on the time out chair for that and that was just non-violent things."* In their research, Cooper and Johnson (2007) found that a lack of understanding about adoption and early life experiences resulted in poor teacher judgements and unrealistic expectations. If we think that a child is being defiant which threatens our role as an adult, parent or teacher then we will respond

in a way that asserts our authority putting consequences in place that punish a child for stepping out of the behavioural expectations we place on children. On the other hand, if we see that same behaviour as being a function of their anxiety then we are more likely to respond in a way that aims to reduce their anxieties. Anna states that she felt “. . . *the teachers thought he was just being naughty on purpose . . . there’s no understanding . . . he’s anxious. . .*” Brown et al (2019) have warned that emotional distress associated with early life adversity can present in a similar way to other drivers for challenging behaviour and may lead to school staff unsuccessfully adopting a behaviourist approach. The authors recommend that classroom and wider school interventions for children adopted from care should be based on understanding what effect early adversity has on the psychological well-being for this cohort.

Anna speaks about the difference between her experiences of her son’s mainstream education and her experiences of home education. The differences constructed in the narrative interview are around expectations, time, relationships and adult support. There is a sense that with time, the safety of his mum’s presence and predictable tailored expectations, relationships were built with others without the cloak of trauma impairing their experiences and perception of him. *“It took about 10 weeks before he started relaxing . . . knowing what to expect, getting to know everybody, the teacher knowing him . . .”* Van den Dries et al (2009) reinforce this concept and highlight that through the development of secure attachments, trust is developed between a child and their parents, enabling children to develop trusting relationships with others and be confident in their ability to affect change.

Anna talks about her son needing “. . . adults looking after him all the time. . . he needs a lot to feel safe.” This certainly speaks to his early experience of being repeatedly separated from the adults caring for him. The physical reassurance of being kept in mind through his mum’s presence and her ability to support and guide the regulation of his emotions means that within the home education community, her son “. . . doesn’t really stand out that much, only a little bit. . .” This is in stark contrast to the reconstruction of his time in mainstream education where Anna perceives him to be known by everyone with other children fearful of him.

6:2 Jane’s story.

What does Jane’s story mean for her as an adoptive parent?

Jane’s story is presented under the themes ‘Getting Kids, Getting Parents’, ‘Needs, Necessity and Parental Expectations’, ‘School Expectations Causing Contention and Disharmony’ and ‘Not Different but Definitely Not the Same’ and makes many references to the importance of relationships in her experience of her children’s education. Under the theme ‘Getting Kids, Getting Parents’, Jane talks about how the nursery teacher ‘got’ her son and ‘got parents’. In the analysis, I inferred ‘got’ to mean understands. In understanding her and her son, the Jane perceives the teacher to values and accept her son for who he is “. . . she got the things he liked and the things he didn’t like. . .” and sees the teacher as understanding her position and what she needs as a parent “. . . she was willing to listen to me and my concerns. . .” Having a good relationship with teachers who are able to demonstrate a shared understanding appears to be important to Jane’s experiences of her children’s

education. The relationships that Jane highlights are between her and the teacher and between the teacher and her children. Research highlights parental involvement in education as a positive influence on pupil attendance, behaviour and attitude, the parent-teacher relationship, teacher morale, school climate and parental confidence and satisfaction (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). Hornby and Blackwell (2018) found that while there are improvements in parental involvement, barriers to their involvement still exist. Related to this, Fan et al (2018) suggests that it is necessary to understand and dismantle the complex relationship of barriers; child factors, individual parent/family factors, parent- teacher factors and societal factors.

The constructed narrative suggests that the teacher's understanding of Jane's children and their situation is fundamental to the maintenance of her involvement and the parent-teacher relationship. Where this is perceived to be absent, Jane describes a break down in relationship and the lack of empathy she experiences is felt deeply *"You just don't say that to an adoptive parent because that's the fear isn't it?"* Jane gives a sense that she felt blamed for the difficulties they were having at home with her son's behaviour. As he was not displaying challenging behaviour in school Jane experiences the teacher to be not willing to take on board her concerns as they were not evident in school. In her reconstruction of the teacher attributing her son's behaviour to attachment difficulties, you get a sense that Jane felt offended. Cooper and Johnson (2007) note that many adoptive parents feel blamed due to a lack of understanding about the challenges adoptive parents can face. Additionally, research has found that school staff face challenges appreciating the

difficulties parents have when if there are no concerns in school (Langton and Boy, 2017).

The perceived assumptions about her son's attachment difficulties highlight the limitations in relying upon broad theoretical frameworks in understanding the experiences of individuals. The theory of attachment gives us an insight and understanding about the importance of attachments with a main caregiver and the formation of subsequent relationships. Attachment is a central psychological theory in adoption as children adopted from care have experienced separation and disrupted attachments with at least one main caregiver. However, attributing the function of all adopted children's behaviours to attachment difficulties is not appropriate as the theory does not provide a "*model of understanding for all human behaviour.*" (Slater, 2007 p. 214). Ford et al, (2007) investigated the prevalence of attachment problems in children in care, discovering that only 2% were recognised to have a possible attachment disorder while 20% have been shown to present with attachment-related problems (Meltzer, et al., 2003). Additionally, van den Dries et al (2009) have found a decrease in the rates of insecure and disorganised attachments in adopted children. Therefore, the label of attachment difficulties should not be assumed to apply to all children adopted from care. To make this assumption is to dismiss the unique and complex nature of adoptive families. For example, Woolgar and Scott (2014) warn that too often the difficulties children adopted from care present with are understood in terms of attachment difficulties or disorders. They see this as reflecting a misunderstanding of attachment theory and the effects of abuse and neglect on development. Research shows that

adoptive families want their individual situations to be understood (Langton and Boy, 2017) and this appears to be reflected in some aspects of Jane's story. Jane talks about the importance of staff understanding and knowing about attachment and trauma but not in relation to her children. Jane explains that any trauma her children experienced was minimal and in utero. As such, she does not see this as having a bearing on their presentation now.

The narrative Jane adopts when thinking about any challenges her children might face is about temperament, characteristics and genetics. However, Jane does recognise the importance of the early life experiences of her children and their adopted status, sharing this information with the school because it is part of whom they are. However, she gives the impression that it is not this that defines her children *"They go into school no worse or not better than other kids that aren't adopted who are wailing and gnashing teeth far more than my two are."* Under the theme of 'Not Different but Definitely Not the Same', Jane emphasises the importance of her children's characteristics, individual differences and interests and gives a sense that it is this that should be appreciated, considered and understood rather than them being adopted. Jane sees attachment and trauma as being overarching approach, *". . . about so many kids that I just think it's about making it as normal as you know autism . . . changing the ethos of the school accordingly."*

Jane's story speaks to the importance of understanding in the development of a positive home-school relationship. A lack of understanding can affect the parent-teacher relationship. Azad et al (2018), state that a good parent-teacher

relationship can have a positive impact on the success of pupils in and out of school. However, they recognise that establishing a positive partnership can be challenging. They highlight the role of communication, time, support and structure as factors that affect the development of parent-teacher relationships. Wood and Olivier (2011) recognise that teachers do not often see parents as being a positive element in the education of their children, often seeing them as part of the problem. Jane talks about her needs and expectations of staff as an adoptive parent and talks about specific times where she has felt it necessary to challenge particular staff or speak with senior leaders about whole school practice. I wonder whether this reflects Jane's perception of her role as parent and the culture and status of the parents at this particular school. Lyons (2011) recognises that one of the roles of adoptive parents is that of protector. As with the majority of parents, there is an innate desire to protect our children, however I wonder if there is a need to overcompensate in adoptive parenting in an attempt to counter the early life experiences of children adopted from care. With regard to the culture and status of parents and Jane's expectations of the staff at school, this could be viewed through the lens of threat and the balance of power (Johnstone and Boyle, 2018). When Jane appears to feel threatened from the actions or responses of the teacher, she asserts her authority and status to ensure that her needs and that of her children are met. It also helps that Jane gives a sense that she feels secure in her knowledge and experience to know what is needed and what standards are expected. She explains, ". . . *you often end up being better informed than the professionals because it is motivating to you. . .*" Research supports this experience

finding that many adoptive parents see themselves as being knowledgeable experts on adoption and their children (Lyons, 2011; Langton and Boy, 2017).

What does Jane's story mean for her son and daughter as children adopted from care?

Jane's constructed narrative speaks to the importance of understanding the function of a child's behaviour. Jane reconstructs a situation where she experienced difficulties getting her son to complete his homework. It was Jane's opinion that it was not worth having a battle over homework and if school wanted him to complete it, the motivation should come from school. Jane recounts her memories of the teacher suggesting that she show Jane's son the work that other children had completed. Jane felt that doing this would feed into his lack of confidence around learning and further exacerbate his fear of failure. The DfE (2018), states that good pupil-teacher relationships and staff who have an awareness of the experiences and prevalence of SEN of children adopted from care are protective factors for these children's mental health and wellbeing.

Under the theme 'Getting Kids, Getting Parents' Jane speaks about the importance of the teacher knowing ". . . *the things he liked and the things he didn't like. . .*" Jane emphasises her need for the teacher to appreciate and value her son as an individual. This speaks to the idea of teaching and learning being child-focused, building upon the strengths of the pupils and recognising progress, even small steps of development. Jane highlights the awareness of her son when this does not happen, ". . . [son] came home and said, 'I wrote sentences' and I said, 'Oh that's

amazing [teacher] must have been so proud.’ ‘No, because I didn’t leave finger spaces . . .” In Jane’s reconstruction of events she appears to perceive there to be a lack of appreciation for her son’s efforts. In her recount of her son’s response, there is a sense that she feels this is affecting his confidence around learning. In support of this, Hargreaves (2014) reports that teacher feedback can not only affect a pupil’s immediate understanding but can also have an impact on their attitude, and approach to learning.

Under the theme ‘School Expectations Causing Contention and Disharmony’ Jane refers to wider systemic factors such as curriculum expectations and government policy and highlights the disparity with her expectations and priorities for her children, *“The fact that they’re learning joined up writing I think is absolutely frigging ridiculous. . .”* She talks about her perception of school staff not having much control over this although she appears to apportion responsibility to them for how curriculum expectations are communicated to her children. Selwyn et al (2015) found that expectations were a concern for some adoptive parents. However, rather than expecting too much, the parents in the Selwyn et al study highlighted concerns about low expectations and staff avoiding potential disruption by pacifying their children. In addition to this, they also found that particular curriculum subjects caused distress for their children; talking about their birth and drawing family trees (Selwyn et al, 2015).

Jane reconstructs her experience of her daughter transitioning from one academic year to the next. She believes that the teacher is key in her daughter’s experience.

The constructed narrative suggests the building of relationships with the teacher and knowing what to expect is important to her daughter's adjustment to a new academic year. Brown et al (2019) recognise that building trust through the teacher–pupil relationship improves the chances of a successful school experience and supports the development of educational resilience.

Jane speaks about her children's individual characteristics, strengths and areas of challenge and how her experience of their education is related to this. However, she also emphasises the role of the teacher, their relationship with and understanding of her children and systemic factors as playing a part in the engagement and wellbeing of her children. Jane states, "I mean I worry about education and the stresses it puts on kids but not in terms of adoption."

6:3 Kevin's Story.

Kevin's story is presented under the theme's 'Deception and Loneliness in the Fight for Provision', 'Parental Skills and Influence' and 'Navigating the System'. Kevin's story focuses on his experiences of his eldest son's education and makes very little reference to his son's experience. As such, I will only consider what Kevin's story means for him.

What does Kevin's story mean for him as an adoptive parent?

Kevin speaks about his experience of working with school staff and educational and social care professionals. From the very start when his sons moved in with him and his partner, Kevin reconstructs a number of events when he felt he received

misguided or incomplete information and advice. Kevin sees some of this as being a result of people caring but for others he sees it as reflecting their lack of understanding and knowledge. When liaising with school staff, Kevin recalls his experience of staff presenting an edited version of events which leaves Kevin feeling frustrated and in the dark about his sons' behaviour and academic performance. Kevin wanted school staff in particular to 'just be blunt' and 'say it how it is'. Research shows that communication between school staff and parents is pertinent to parental engagement with parents like Kevin, expecting a certain level of communication and responsiveness to issues they raise (Russell and Granville, 2005). Recommendations from this study suggest that the language school staff use with parents should be adapted to support their engagement. However, for Kevin he is clearly stating a need for school staff to 'say it how it is'. Under the theme 'Deception and Loneliness in the Fight for Provision', Kevin talks about being given 'false hope' in his reconstruction of professionals, saying 'we're going to turn this around'. While this is from a position of support and hope, Kevin would prefer a pragmatic approach that helps him to manage his expectations. This difference could be representative of a difference in social and cultural status as Russell and Granville (2005) pursued the opinions of those parents who are less likely to be involved with school, such as those with English as an additional language and traveller families.

The need to know and be fully informed appears to be important to Kevin and feeling like he is unable to rely on others to give him accurate information, Kevin ". . . went on every single adoption training course I bloody could, I read every bloody

book I could read. . .” This speaks to the phrase, ‘knowledge is power’. While Kevin identified ‘amazing’ professionals that he came into contact with, those that wanted to help, were supportive and were experts in their field, overall Kevin gave the impression that he had lost trust and faith in the professionals that were involved with his son. Selwyn et al (2015) reported the regrets some adoptive parents had about trusting professionals and not challenging their views. Placing trust in the professionals had meant going against their better judgements, particularly about starting their children in school so soon after being placed with them. Additionally, like Kevin, some parents complained about being unprepared for their child’s needs due to a lack of information being shared by professionals. To support this concept, Lyons (2011) found that professionals did not treat parents as knowledgeable or trustworthy when sharing information. Consequently, Selwyn et al (2015) found that the majority of adoptive parents were happy with the support they received from professionals sighting them as being helpful.

In his narrative about his search for appropriate provision for his son, Kevin utilised his professional skills and personal resources to secure a place at a specialist residential school. Research suggests that it is down to the tenacity of parents that adoption disruption does not occur, rather than the absence of difficulties (Selwyn et al, 2015). Kevin reflected on his position in relation to other adoptive parents highlighting the inequality he sees when the outcome for their family has been because of his professional experience and influence, flexible working arrangements and support network. Kevin paints a lonely picture of a battle against the systems and processes in order to get to this point. In support of this, research has proposed

that other adoptive parents have also felt lonely in their battle with services (Selwyn et al, 2015).

Kevin speaks about the perceived lack of empathy and understanding he received, particularly from school staff, “. . . *no one really quite understanding . . . just how challenging he was on a day to day basis . . .*” He specifically speaks about the impact of home-schooling and part time provisions such as Pupil Referral Units and Resourced Provisions on his ability to work. In the constructed narrative, Kevin speaks about his perception of school staff not having consideration for his commitment to work and he felt there was an expectation that he would be available as and when school required. Kevin reconstructed an event where he was unavailable on one occasion; the Headteacher threatened to call social care if they were unable to contact him. This left Kevin feeling let down and betrayed especially as he felt that he had been very helpful with school.

For Kevin work provided him with time out of a very intense and emotive situation caring for his eldest son and fighting for provision. Kevin highlights the absence of childcare support that many other parents have available. Due to the nature of his eldest son’s emotional distress, he was not able to attend before or after school clubs and extended family members were either not available or were not able to manage the challenges of caring for his son. The typical support networks other working parents turn to were not viable.

Kevin talks about his experience of navigating systems and processes, particularly in relation to the length of time it took for situations to move forward. In the constructed narrative Kevin talks about having to wait for all the relevant professionals to get together and make a decision. Explaining that despite being at crisis point and voicing safeguarding concerns, it took six months for a decision to be made about his son attending a specialist residential school. Throughout the narrative there is a sense that the processes and systems added to the pressure the family was already under caring for their eldest son and negotiating his educational provision. Kevin also spoke about the number of professionals involved and feeling like he had to repeatedly tell their story, “. . . *it felt like you’re having to go through it all over again. . .*” Kevin gives a sense that having to do this, was not only time consuming, but also had an emotional impact. Kevin talks about the amount of communication between himself, school and other professionals and feeling like it needed to be driven by him with no one else taking on the role of coordinating his son’s educational provision. Selwyn et al (2015) found that adoptive parents spent time searching for appropriate provision and reflected on the amount of correspondence they had accumulated liaising with services. Kevin states;

“. . . it really makes me annoyed that the system can’t cope, I don’t understand why there isn’t . . . like, ‘ok we’ve got a kid with an attachment disorder so here’s the potential checklist for the kind of things you should be doing at school’ . . . and if this doesn’t work out this is what we’re going to do next.”

However, Selwyn et al (2015) did report that 78% of their participants were generally pleased with the involvement of other services.

6:4 Discussion of Final Analysis

What do these stories mean for school staff and educational psychologists working with children adopted from care and their families?

Expectations

Expectations is a theme that runs throughout the stories of each participant. This is in relation to their experiences of the expectations of others placed on both parents and children. Anna and Kevin talk about their experiences of expectations placed on them to be available as and when needed. While neither Kevin nor Anna disputed their role in the education of their children, they both perceived there to be a lack of understanding and empathy from school staff in relation to the affect these expectations had on them.

As the schools found it increasingly harder to manage the children in the absence of appropriate strategies and provision, Anna and Kevin felt they were called upon to supplement the gap in educational provision by removing their child from the setting and 'home schooling'. While Kevin was able to be flexible in his work, being able to respond to the expectations, Anna gave up her job as her son's time in school was reduced to an hour a day. Selwyn et al (2015) also found that schools would expect parents to be at school as and when they needed which made working very difficult for a number of adoptive parents.

Anna and Jane talk about the expectations placed on their children. These expectations are constructed in relation to behaviour and learning, from staff at school and curriculum policies. The construction of the expectations felt to be on

their children can be understood to be born out of a set of complex interrelated factors that need to be understood in order that changes can be made. The education system promotes high expectations and accountability in its monitoring and assessment of teaching and learning. Changes to curriculum expectations have added pressure to the teaching profession to achieve higher standards of academic performance. With the added complication of austerity and funding cuts, schools are feeling the pressure to perform in difficult circumstances. The accountability of teachers to ensure that their pupils meet age related expectations will undoubtedly have a bearing on the academic and behavioural expectations placed on Anna and Jane's children. Jane highlights the role of the teacher in how she sees these expectations being communicated to her son. In addition to this, Jane also makes reference to her perception of the inappropriateness of some curriculum expectations for her son and his peers as a whole.

Behavioural expectations are necessary in a school in order that the adults in school are able to control and teach large numbers of children. Behavioural expectations are also necessary in communicating and teaching social norms and conformity and managing social interactions. In controlling and managing children and young people there is a power imbalance weighted in favour of the teachers. It is expected that the teacher will have control and power in the classroom. Where a child or young person challenges this control and power by not conforming to expectations, this can be seen as a threat to the teacher's role and perception of competency. In a situation where behaviours are seen as a challenge for power and a threat to the teacher's role, 'consequences' based on operant conditioning are often

implemented. Anna constructed her experience of this with her son and the use of a 'naughty' chair. In this situation, Anna perceived the consequence for her son to outweigh the severity of his behaviour. Anna gives a sense that she did not feel the response to consider the function of his behaviour or show any understanding of his needs but instead focused on reinforcing the teacher's authority. It is important therefore that the function of a child's behaviour is understood in order that appropriate responses are realised.

Knowledge, Understanding and Empathy

Knowing and understanding is another theme that runs throughout each narrative but is spoken about in different ways. The theme refers to the knowledge or lack of that both the participants and school staff have in relation to the education of children adopted from care. Knowledge was identified as something important for all three participants. Anna began her journey in a position of not knowing, wanting school staff to know and then through their journey, she came to a state of knowing. Kevin was similar in that he relied on the information and knowledge shared by professionals at the beginning of his journey but soon came to feel that he needed to find and gather the knowledge himself; reading books and attending training. Jane explains that as an adoptive parent, you may start at a position of not knowing but the motivation to know means that you often end up knowing more than the professionals. Cooper and Johnson (2007) found that 33% of parents had not received any information about schools and education prior to adopting their children and 37% were not aware of the potential difficulties their children might face in school. Cooper and Johnson recommended that comprehensive information

about potential educational issues should be discussed with prospective adopters during the adoption process. In Anna and Kevin's experience, they did not see professionals as addressing this.

Anna makes reference to her perception of the school staff not knowing what to do with her son and how this meant that she felt they were not in control of her son. 'Knowledge is Power', is a popular phrase and one that is pertinent to Jane's narrative and Kevin's narrative. Without knowledge, Jane implies school staff to have no power. In his accumulation of knowledge, Kevin was able to attain the provision he felt most suited the needs of his son. Jane presented herself as secure in her knowledge and as such felt able to challenge the practice of school staff, asserting her authority in her role as parent.

Understanding what lies beneath a child's presentation is vital for the adjustment and progress of all children. Anna talks about her perception of her son's school not understanding that his refusal to follow instructions is not because he is 'naughty' but because he is extremely anxious. It is important for school staff to have knowledge about issues related to children adopted from care such as attachment and trauma but also to know the individual children and understand what drives their behaviours and emotional responses.

With understanding comes empathy but in general, this was missing from Kevin and Anna's experiences. There were glimpses of understanding and empathy from some professionals involved with Anna's son. Anna appreciated those professionals that

were thoughtful and considerate in their involvement, demonstrating an understanding of her situation. Kevin stated that had experienced school staff being empathetic, it would have been a less lonely existence. Jane explained that school staff who listened and understood her contributed positively to her experiences of her children's education.

Support and Provision

Anna and Kevin both sought support from a number of professionals and were able to identify those they felt contributed positively to their experience of the children's education. For Anna, these were the people who she felt had knowledge and understanding of attachment, adoption and home education and those that were thoughtful and considered in their contributions. Where Anna's experiences were less positive, she highlighted her experience of professionals shirking responsibility, having limited knowledge with minimal effort and contribution offered. Kevin also appreciated those professionals that he perceived to be knowledgeable, had experience and were keen to do their best to support his son. He highlighted his experience of a lack of understanding and empathy for his situation as a factor that negatively contributed to his experience.

However, for Kevin it was more about a battle with the systems and processes that impeded the allocation of timely provision and support. Kevin felt that it was down to his experience, knowledge and skills that he was finally able to secure appropriate provision for his son. Anna too felt frustrated with the processes and systems, in particular feeling that regular professionals' meetings were a waste of time with too

many people involved. Time was a significant factor mentioned in Anna and Kevin's stories and related to the length of time they felt it took for decisions to be made and for support to be provided. This was in stark contrast to their reconstruction of the speed at which their children's emotional distress intensified. In a situation where emotions are suddenly heightened and distress is acute, decision-making and access to provision is never going to be quick enough, but in Anna's experience, she felt it was too late and for Kevin, six months was too long.

Unlike Kevin, Anna gave a sense that she had no control over the decisions and direction of her son's educational provision. This highlights the contrast of experience, where one parent constructs himself as the driving force behind his son's educational provision while the other parent constructs a narrative about being at the mercy of the professionals. These experiences speak of a need for a collaborative relationship between school staff, professionals and parents. In addition to this, Kevin identifies a need for a professional to champion their corner and coordinate the search for provision. The responsibility of the Virtual School Headteacher was extended to include previously looked after children in order to promote their educational achievement. However, the extent of the Virtual School Headteacher's role in the education of previously looked after children is at the discretion of the local authority. At a minimum, they must provide advice, information and sign posting to services (DfE, 2018b). Kevin found that while the Virtual School Headteacher was involved, he felt they were not able to add anything new or different to what Kevin already knew.

Jane talks a lot about the importance of relationships, which is supported by Kevin and Anna who speak of the importance of understanding and empathy. Jane highlights her expectation that teachers should be available to listen to her and have the time and desire to get to know her son and their situation. The DfE (2011a) highlight the power of parental involvement in education and the importance of the parent-teacher relationship. A review of the literature has demonstrated that a number of factors, time being one, can affect the parent-teacher relationship (Azad et al, 2018). The demands placed on teachers can affect the amount of time they have available to speak with parents regularly. Furthermore, developing relationships can be difficult in situations of heightened emotion such as managing the emotional distress of children and young people. Some adoptive parents report feeling ignored with their expertise undervalued (Lyons, 2011; Langton and Boy, 2017) and this is certainly reflected in Jane's narrative. On the other hand, while Kevin felt a lack of empathy and understanding, he was able to utilise his expertise. However, this was for the purpose of coordinating provision rather than giving advice to schools about issue related to adoption.

Anna's narrative included her experiences of witnessing the impact of her son's emotional distress on the teaching assistants supporting him. She constructs them as 'one that hated him and one that was crying all the time'. Edwards (2016) considers the emotional labour teacher's experience working with looked after children. She explains that a wide range of emotions are experienced by teachers and while some were able to identify positive feelings, feelings of sadness, anger, anxiety, shock and frustration were also shared. While the teachers attempted to

hide their emotions from the children, other research found strong emotions difficult to manage and expressed in their practice (Rocco-Briggs, 2008). Whether teachers are able to suppress their emotions or not, the impact on their emotional well-being will be significant. It is important therefore that school staff and educational psychologists recognise and acknowledge the emotional needs of those staff working with children who are or have previously been in care (Edwards, 2016).

The interpretation of the narratives co-constructed with the participants has produced a range of themes that can inform the practice of school staff and educational psychologists. These themes speak to different elements of educational practice and reflect the experiences of other adoptive parents highlighted in the research literature: Collaboration, knowledge and understanding, parent-teacher relationships and pupil-teacher relationships. However, there are some that are emphasised in this research that are less well documented in the literature: expectations, empathy, and involvement of professionals

6:5 Limitations

There are a number of limitations arising from the design and conduct of this study. Participants were only interviewed on one occasion, which prevented opportunity to build a solid rapport over time. This may have affected how comfortable the participants felt in sharing their personal experiences. Carless and Douglas (2017) suggest that an empathetic and trusting relationship between interviewer and interviewee built over time is key to good narrative research. These factors enable interviewees to express themselves openly and share their vulnerabilities. However,

due to the short time scale for completion of the study and difficulty in recruiting sufficient numbers, this was not feasible.

In narrative research, it is important to acknowledge the role of the researcher and their positionality in the design, data collection and analysis. Throughout this study, I have referred to my presence and influence in the co-construction and interpretation of the narratives. In addition to this, I have used reflective boxes in an attempt to be transparent in my position and understanding of the stories shared by the participants. My position as an adoptive parent has brought a particular perspective to the design, data collection and interpretation. The narrative approach to interviewing involved using rapport building questions to get context information and settle into the conversation with subsequent questions being in response to the flow of the co-constructed narrative. While the direction of the interview was led for the most part by the participant, some of the questioning used changed the course of the narrative and may have inhibited aspects of the intended narrative.

Therefore, my position and influence potentially compromised the individual experiences of the participants (Elliott, 2011). In order to clarify my interpretation of the narratives with the participants' intended meanings it would have been beneficial to share my understanding with them. However, due to time constraints this was not possible.

Furthermore, due to the interviews being a reflective account of events that have happened in the, albeit, recent past, memories and perceptions of events can be distorted and reconstructed in different ways. This can depend on the time elapsed, subsequent experiences and who the story is being constructed with and for what purpose. Stories can be used to serve a function and be performed according to how the storyteller wants to be understood (Patterson, 2013). This will have certainly influenced what the participants shared and how they shared it. Thus, the reconstruction of events is not a factual account of their experiences but rather it is a reconstruction of their memories and perceptions of events communicated in a particular way (Warham, 2012).

Due to the small sample size, the results presented in this study are not representative of all adoptive parents' experiences. However, the results do provide a rich picture of themes that are reflected in the literature and as such can be used to inform practice.

There are a number of limitations in the use of thematic analysis. The first being a lack of set rules to follow when conduct thematic analysis. This leaves the process open to interpretation and means there is no consistency of approach when analysing studies. Additionally, due to the word limitation of the study it was not possible to utilise the whole narrative, which meant losing a sense of the chronology and context. I feel that the participants' experiences were significantly reduced and had the potential to contribute more to the understanding of parental experiences of the education of their children.

6:6 Recommendations for further research

There is a growing body of adoption research across a range of disciplines. However, research on children adopted from care in the UK is lacking. In particular, the literature review demonstrates a gap in the research in relation to adoption and education. While there is overwhelming evidence of the benefits of parental involvement in education, there is very little research into adoptive parents' experiences, views and involvement in education.

To improve understanding in this area, further research could seek to include a larger sample of adoptive parents with a particular focus on either mainstream education or specialist educational provision. This would give a more comprehensive view of the provision available for children adopted from care and how this is experienced by adoptive parents.

In addition to this, it would be beneficial to investigate the school perspective on the education of children adopted from care. In particular, exploring the experiences of teachers working with children adopted from care would provide an alternative perspective and may highlight barriers, emotional impact and best practice for supporting children adopted from care.

Finally, research that can provide a triangulation of experience by exploring the experiences of teachers, adoptive parents and their children would give a rich in depth holistic picture of the education of children adopted from care.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion.

7:1 Summary of overall findings.

I approached this research enquiry as an adoptive parent and a TEP. My own personal experiences of adoption together with experiences obtained whilst on placement had fostered my interest in what adoption means in the context of school. Ultimately, I felt concern that professionals working with children might be making inaccurate assumptions and generalisations regarding adopted children's needs. I had noticed an increasing tendency towards pathologizing childhood experiences and wanted to see child behaviours or patterns of expression as a coping mechanisms rather than a pathological process requiring a form a specific treatment.

The current body of literature clearly documents that a child's early life experiences can continue to adversely affect development and progress for many years even with the security and permanence of adoption. However, the current literature does not adequately address the experiences of adopted parents with respect to their child's schooling, large amounts of this data has not been published in peer reviewed academic journals. Professional understanding of the expert knowledge parents may hold with respect to their child is vital to an effective Educational Psychology consultation and their experiences may be vital to inform practice for those involved in the education of these children. As such, this enquiry was designed to gain adoptive parents views of their child's education / schooling using a narrative, storytelling approach in order to illuminate personal experiences, their meaning and the socio-cultural context in which these experiences are moulded.

Following interviews with three adoptive parents with diverse experiences and backgrounds, a number of individual and shared themes were developed using an 8-step process described in detail within the method section.

Anna's story generated the four main themes;

- 1. *Knowing, not knowing and the struggle to understand.***
- 2. *The battle for control.***
- 3. *Too many people, too late.***
- 4. *The weight of expectation.***

Jane's story also developed four main themes;

- 1. *Getting kids, getting parents.***
- 2. *Not different but definitely not the same.***
- 3. *Needs, necessity and parental expectations.***
- 4. *Contention, disharmony and school expectations.***

Kevin's story resulted in the development of three main themes;

- 1. *Deception, loneliness and the fight for provision.***
- 2. *Parental skills and influence.***
- 3. *Navigating the system.***

The final analysis brought together the themes from each of the participants and provided an attempt to search for commonality. My interpretation of the narratives

and subsequent themes suggested that there were three common themes amongst the participants;

1. *Expectations.*

2. *Knowing and understanding.*

3. *Support.*

The participants all had very different experiences of the education of their children. This was reflected by development of individual themes. However, there was clearly a level of relatedness that resulted in common themes amongst the participants. These common themes were constructed in very different ways but it is clear that the stories speak of the role of school staff and educational psychologists in adoptive parents' experiences of their child's education. The need for knowledgeable and understanding professionals who display honesty and purpose in their communication was seen as important. Furthermore, it was considered important that professionals become aware of the impact of their expectations on adoptive parents and their children. It was considered that these professionals should show empathy and understanding of individual circumstances. Participants wanted professionals to take control by leading communication and provision in order to reduce the pressure for adoptive parents to take control of their own child's education.

7:2 Implications for Practice

Kevin, Jane and Anna's narratives highlight practice, policies and processes within adoption services and the education system that have had a significant bearing on their experiences of being adoptive parents, their experiences of their child's education and on the wellbeing of their children and family as a whole.

Kevin spoke candidly about professionals not fully informing him about his children, from the point of matching where he was given the wrong information, to not being kept informed about his son's progress in school. The significance of being given the wrong information about the long term impact of his eldest son's early life experiences meant that they were ill-prepared for the reality of family life with a child presenting with significant attachment difficulties. Kevin's experience highlights the importance of professionals being open and honest with adoptive parents, ensuring that they are fully informed about their child's prior experiences and the possible impact of these experiences on their child's development. While there are opportunities for attachment and trauma training once parents have adopted, Kevin's experience highlights the need for adoptive parents to be prepared and have the knowledge and necessary information prior to their child/ren coming to live with them.

Furthermore, prior to her son's experience at school, Anna had not considered that having to give up work, because school were unable to meet his needs, could be a reality for her. During the training package for prospective adopters, time should be given to raising awareness of the range of experiences adopted children may have in

school. School is a significant factor in the development and wellbeing of all children. Given the adverse early life experiences of many adopted children, school experience becomes more significant. Through sharing their experiences, Kevin, Anna and Jane demonstrate the impact of school on the wellbeing of their children and family as a whole. The educational experience of adopted children should not be underestimated when preparing prospective adopters to become parents.

As an adoptive parent there is so much you do not know about your children prior to becoming their parent. Your child has had experiences that you have not shared and with information being limited it is not possible to fully know or understand the impact of these experiences. Both Kevin and Anna talked about the importance of 'knowing', 'not knowing' and 'wanting to know'. In particular, Anna's narrative highlighted the process of 'coming to know' her adopted child. Anna's experience of her child's education appeared to affect 'coming to know' her son. The experiences Anna had with her son related to their time together as a family and his time in nursery. With the new experience of school, she spoke about not knowing he would react in the way he did. As Anna was coming to know her son in relation to this new experience, so school was also coming to know her son. However, what school was coming to know about her son was different to what she had come to know about him already and this juxtaposition appeared to threaten the fragile state of knowing about her son.

Anna's experience and the theme of 'knowing, not knowing and the struggle to understand' reinforces the importance of adoptive parents feeling in a position of knowing. However, it also highlights the significance of school in the process of

coming to know your adopted child and the potential impact on the developing bond and attachment between an adoptive parent and their child. Attachment, separation and loss are themes that will impact on an adoptive child's experiences of their education. If they are not yet in a position of feeling safe and secure in their new home, being exposed to new relationships in school, nursery or other establishments too soon could exacerbate their feelings of separation and loss and depending on the point at which they join school, can add to their experiences of separation and loss at the end of a school year. This will create emotional responses that can impact on adoptive parents coming to know their child. As such a more thoughtful plan for when adopted children start school would be beneficial for all. Furthermore, Anna and Kevin's experiences highlight the need for schools to have a greater understanding of adoption, attachment and trauma. All three participants emphasised the benefits of school staff understanding their situation and the needs of their child/ren. This would enable schools to plan and prepare appropriate transition for adopted children starting school.

Where adopted children are struggling in school and provision is not meeting their needs, Kevin felt that the pressure on families at this time could be minimised if there was someone to advocate for them, lead and coordinate the navigation of systems and the search for educational provision. In Kevin's situation, he became the driving force for his son's change in provision and without his experience, dedication and drive he feels that the adoption would have disrupted.

Educational psychologists are best placed to be able to identify and understand the systemic and cultural factors along with the presence of power that underlies the role of expectations and relationships in adoptive parents' experiences of their child's education. They have the skills and knowledge to understand and explore these factors with school staff and adoptive parents to enable a change of approach. Additionally, it is important for school staff and educational psychologists to recognise the impact of expectations and the importance of empathy and differentiation for children adopted from care and their families.

Educational Psychologists are also able to support schools in developing their understanding of attachment and trauma and the function of behaviour in relation to children adopted from care. However, it is also important to emphasise the individual nature of each family in order that intervention and support is not based on assumptions but rather a thorough holistic understanding of the situation. Furthermore, thought should be given to how the theory of attachment is used to understand the needs of children adopted from care. The use of terms such as attachment difficulties and attachment disorder can often be understood and applied interchangeably but refer to very different things (Woolgar and Scott, 2014). I wonder if through 'giving psychology away' there is a risk that terms and understanding are misunderstood and misapplied. From an applied psychology perspective, it is important to think about what our understanding of an insecure or secure attachment means to the relationship developing between a child adopted from care and their parents. Furthermore, how does this inform the support and guidance shared with families and school staff. Bell (2012) proposes a focus on the

dynamics of attachment rather than the categorical terms. He highlights the role of caregiving in preceding the development of an attachment. I wonder whether a focus on caregiving as described by Bell (2012) could be more enabling than a within child label of attachment difficulties.

Additionally, school staff and educational psychologists should recognise where adoptive parents are in their knowledge base. Are they at the beginning of their journey in a state of not knowing, working through coming to know their child or are they secure in their knowledge having attended training and read books and able to share their knowledge and expertise with others. Being sensitive to the process of 'coming to know' and considering the inter-related factors of school experience and the relationships and role of school staff and professionals in this journey is important. Adoptive families need time and space to come to know their children and the heightened emotional distress of a child can impede the development of a secure attachment (Barone and Lionetti, 2011).

Finally, it is important that school staff and educational psychologists recognise and acknowledge the emotional needs of those staff working with children who are or have previously been in care (Edwards, 2016).

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Appendix

Participant Information Sheet

The stories adoptive parents tell of their experiences in the schooling/ education of their child/ren.

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide to proceed, 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 discuss it with others if you wish. Ask the lead researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

1. What is the project's purpose?

I am interested in the education of children adopted from care and would like to enable schools and other educational professionals to fully support the needs of children adopted from care and their families. I believe that this can be best done through understanding the experiences of adoptive parents and drawing upon their expertise. This research study is being conducted as part fulfilment of a Doctorate in Child and Educational Psychology from the University of Sheffield and will be conducted over 18 months.

2. Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you meet the inclusion criteria for the research study that is:

- You have at least one child who has been adopted from care for a period of 2 years or more.
- Your child is of primary school age and has attended school for at least one year.
- You are fully able to understand the purpose of the research, the details of your involvement and will be able to give informed consent.

3. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without penalty. You do not have to

give a reason. If at any stage you wish to withdraw from the research study, the lead researcher will, at your request, destroy all data collected as part of your contribution. However, if you are happy for the anonymised data collected during your participation to be used towards the final results of the study, this can be discussed with the chief investigator.

4. What will happen to me if I take part?

If you consent to take part in the research study you will be invited to an informal interview to share your adoption experiences, particularly in relation to your child's education. The interview will use a narrative approach and will be very much like a conversation rather than a question and answer interview. It is expected that you will be able to talk openly and be comfortable reflecting on your experiences. The interview will be audio recorded and will take place at an agreed venue lasting approximately 1 hour. The recordings will be transcribed and important aspects will be used towards the results of the study. Your name and any personal details will not be shared with anyone and you will not be identifiable through any information you share.

5. Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

The audio recording of the interview made during this research will be used only for transcription and analysis. No other use will be made of it without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

6. What do I have to do?

Your involvement in this study will consist of one visit (to a mutually agreed venue) lasting for approximately one hour in duration. During this time, you will be required to participate as explained above (number 4).

7. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There is a risk that while sharing and reflecting on your adoption experiences, you may experience strong emotions. If this occurs then the interview can be temporarily suspended and support provided if requested.

8. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will provide you with an opportunity to reflect on your

experiences and contribute to the aim of developing a training programme for schools and associated professionals.

9. What if something goes wrong?

If as part of your participation in this research study you wish to make a complaint please contact Jessica Stout on the contact details below. If you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction you should contact Anthony Williams on the contact details below.

10. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications.

11. What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project's objectives?

During the interview, it is expected that you will be able to talk openly and be comfortable reflecting on your adoption experiences, particularly in relation to your child's education.

12. What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results of the research project are likely to be published in the Summer of 2019. A copy of the published results will be available by request from the lead researcher. Your personal details will not be identified in any report or publication.

Due to the nature of this research it is very likely that other researchers may find the data collected to be useful in answering future research questions. We will ask for your explicit consent for your data to be shared in this way and if you agree, we will ensure that the data collected about you is untraceable back to you before allowing others to use it.

13. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the Education department's ethics review procedure (every academic department either administers the University's Ethics Review Procedure itself, internally within the department, or accesses the University's Ethics Review Procedure via a cognate, partner department). The University's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

14. Contact for further information

If you are interested in participating in this research project and would like further information please contact Jessica Stout in the first instance. A copy of the information sheet and, if appropriate, a signed consent form will be provided for you to keep.

Jessica Stout (Lead Researcher)

Williams

Jessica.stout@stockport.gov.uk

Supervisor)

0161

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3870/

Anthony.williams@sheffield.ac.uk

Anthony

(Research

07800617908

Thank you for your time and interest in this project.

Participant Consent Form

Title of Research Project: The stories adoptive parents tell of their experiences in the schooling/ education of their child/ren.		
Name of Researcher: Jessica Stout		
Participant Identification Number for this project: Please initial box		
1.	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	I understand that my responses will be anonymised. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	I agree for the anonymised data collected from me to be used in future research	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	I agree to take part in the above research project.	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Name of person taking consent <i>(if different from lead researcher)</i> <i>To be signed and dated in presence of the participant</i>	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Lead Researcher <i>To be signed and dated in presence of the participant</i>	Date	Signature
Copies: Participant Study File		

Interview Structure : Schedule of Prompts

Rapport building

- When did you adopt your child?
- How did you find the adoption process?
- What was your bridging plan like?
- How long do you think it took for you all to adjust?

Core questions

- When did your child start school?
- Tell me about your early experiences of your child's education/ settling into school.
- Who else was involved/ affected by/ helped/ hindered?
- What happened then?': 'How long did that go on?
- When did you realise . . . ?
- What kind of sense did you make of all that?

Cultural Context

- How did you know that...?
- Why do you think that happened?
- What did you think about that?
- Was that something you usually did?
- Was that OK with you?

Embodied Nature

- How did it look to you?
- What was your sense of what was going on?
- How did you cope with that?
- How did that affect you/make you feel/think?
- How did you feel about what they did?
- Did you have any ideas about this at the time?

Significance of other people

- What did your family think of that?
- Who told you?
- Did you ask anyone for help?
- Was anybody else aware of what was happening?
- Where were your friends?

Choices and actions of the teller

- What made you decide to go there?
- Why did you want to do that?
- What were you intending?
- What did you want to happen?
- When did you decide that?

(Kim Etherington, accessed on 04.03.18

<https://www.keele.ac.uk/media/keeleuniversity/facnatsci/schpsych/documents/counselling/conference/5thannual/NarrativeApproachestoCaseStudies.pdf>)

Interview
Stage 1: Transcription
Jane

I = interviewer

P1 = participant 1

I: Right I think that is working, hopefully

P1: Ok

I: Ok. . . erm. . . so you mentioned last week that you've adopted twin girls?

P1: a boy and a girl

I: oh a boy and a girl, sorry, my mistake. Erm, so how long ago was that?

P1: We adopted them in November 2013. . . they came to live with us in November 2013 and the adoption order went through in August '14.

I: August '14, Ok, erm how did you find the process of going through adoption?

P1: Erm. . . Not bad actually. Erm. . . We did it through S****. We were lucky that we had a really really good social worker who was really experienced, erm, who got us, who did it. . . I think it has changed a bit since we did it, but when we did it she just basically did eight chats, and then we had a really random, with themes,

I: yeah Ok

P1: that were themes across

I: Yeah Ok

P1: and then we had one really random session where she asked us random questions where she hadn't got the information from the conversations.

I: Arr right Ok.

P1: So she was experienced enough to make it a conversation not a series of questions, which was quite a skill. Having done lots of assessments myself with people, that's, that's a real skill.

I: Yeah.

P1: And it was all right and then we. . . the wait if you like was getting onto the parenting course that we had to do.

I: Ok

P1: But once we'd got on that, it all happened relatively.... Speedily, it was ok.

I: quite quickly, right.

P1: and then they obviously knew about the twins and the possibility of paring them up with us, before they told us because we had a really hilarious conversation about adopting siblings and I was really up for adopting siblings and *Husband* really didn't want to

I: right Ok

P1: and then I'll always remember *social worker* going 'but what about twins' and *Husband* said 'Oh twins would be fine'

I: [Laughter}

P1: and we both looked at him and went. . . they're siblings [laughter].

I: [laughter]

P1: And *Husband* was like but that's different [laughter]

I:[laughter]

P1: So they obviously knew about them

I: Yeah

P1: so they were the only profile we ever saw.

I: Ok

P1: because you know when you just read it and you know it's right. And then it was a bit tricky, because. . . they told us about them but they had not gone through, there was a final court hearing scheduled for the September. . . and the children's guardian didn't turn up because she was ill

I: Ohh

P1: so I've never wanted to murder somebody quite so much and then it got put back to November.

I: yeah

P1: because that's how long it took to reorganise the court, so that was a really long wait that, was hell. . . So then, then you know it just moves really quickly doesn't it. So yeah.

I: So did you have like a set, this is going to sound really awful, but you know when you go through the process and they say will you accept this, that, the other. . .

P1: yeah we found that really hard because it feels a bit like eugenics

I: Yeah

P1: and you know, I work with people with learning disabilities, *Husband* works with lots of children with challenging behaviours but equally we kind of knew that we wanted, we wanted a family not a job.

I: Yeah

P1: and there is a difference

I: there is. Yeah there is, there is.

P1: and I feel bad saying it but actually we wanted. . . and I think we were lucky that *social worker* really got that.

I: Yeah

P1: . . . because you can almost see them going ooh speech and language therapist, ooh teacher working with kids who challenge, Oooh [laughter]

I: [laughter]

P1: but she also got that it was about family

I: Yeah

P1 and not a therapy for a very traumatised child who needs more than I think we could give and do our jobs

I: Yeah

P1: so erm, so yeah we were yeah, we had said under three, but we didn't expect to get 8 month old babies

I: Aww

P1: we really didn't, so that was just a bonus.

I: So were they 8 months when they came to you then?

P1: Yeah

I: right, wow

P1: yeah, we really didn't, you know we were expecting 2 year olds

I: Yeah, yeah

P1: we really weren't expecting 8 month old babies erm. . . so that was hard in itself because, I mean we were lucky because they had been with really good foster carers,

I: right

P1: really experienced, really, who had their own teenage kids who were very, they were very, really welcoming to us and they had given them a really good start in life, they had got them into some amazing routines that we just continued.

I: Yeah foster parents are really well known for their routines.

P1: Yeah everyone was just like, bloody hell, they sleep at the same time, and I'm like oh yeah they sleep at the same time but it's nothing to do with me [laughter] but then at the same time it's a bad day when they don't sleep at the same time

I: it makes such a difference doesn't it?

P1: such a difference, we were really lucky with all of that.

I: Yeah

P1: nights were still hard but that's I think because they were six weeks prem, so they had to, so again the foster carers had to do it by the book, so they'd been woken for feeds every four hours.

I: ahh right ok

P1: so they were just in this real four

I: so during the night they were feeding

P1: well by the time they came to us they didn't need the four hour feeds through the night but they were still, especially *son* was still in a four hour pattern

I: right, right

P1: which wasn't great [laughter]

I: [laughter]

P1: but, yeah, we got there but it was hard

I: how was settling in then, when they first came?

P1: it was. . . it was all right actually, I've probably, I was so sleep deprived I've probably wiped it from memory, it was all right. I mean it took, I'd say again, I do remember going into them in the middle of the, I think it was. . . it think it was *son*. . . I think it was *son*, yeah I remember going, or it was both of them, I remember going and looking in the middle of the night when they had just come to us and I could just see their little faces and they were like who the hell are you and where the hell am I?

I: Yeah

P1: I just remember that this little baby just like, I don't know who you are, I don't know where I am and I'm really not happy about this, you know and that's fair enough

I: Yeah

P1: but the other aspects were fine, they got there really quickly, but you know it was really interesting they really needed each other . . .

I: so it was helpful for them?

P1: yeah definitely, there was one day where *daughter*, *Son* had gone to sleep but *daughter* wouldn't go to sleep, so I took her out in the buggy because I had to do some stuff, so I took her out and *husband* was at home with *son*, got back and *son* was hysterical because he had woken up and *daughter* wasn't there, she came in, fine.

I: aww wow

P1: and I think it was just like

I: and was that in the early days?

P1: that was in the really early days

I: so they were still very young

P1: yeah but I think it was just like I'm now with someone I don't know, in a house that I don't know and now my sister is gone. It was just like . . . so they are, they fight like cat and dog but they are when the . . . what do you call it? . . . that phrase, but anyway when . . .

I: its tough?

P1: yeah, they're there for each other massively

I: yeah

P1: when they're not sure of something they really want each other

I: they look to each other for reassurance?

P1: yeah definitely, massively

I: Aww

P1: yeah it's really nice but they also beat the crap out of each other [laughter]

I: [laughter]

P1: even as babies, you know you have the LAC meetings still and we had a LAC meeting and *daughter* had raked the back of *sons* neck, absolutely raked it with

her finger nails and then they were late coming so they had been playing with the pens and *son* had scribbled on the back of his neck which I was like marvellous [laughter]

I: [laughter]

P1: hide the scar [laughter]

I: [laughter]

P1: and they used to bite each other a lot, they never, *daughter* bit one other child once, but they used to bite each other all the time and they would go to nursery and I was like yeah you'll notice the ring of teeth

I: ohh

P1: it was awful

I: was that through frustration or just developmental?

P1: I think its just developmental, I think its just that constant having to share. For both of them one of their first words was 'swop'.

I: Really?

P1: It was just 'swop, swop, swop' and that's not a normal first word.

I: no. but they've got the idea, which is good.

P1: yeah but you know you'd give them two identical blue bricks and they would want what the others got.

I: [laughter]

P1: So yeah I think it was just crossness with each other and you know I fought with my siblings like cat and dog and you know, they would drive me demented.

I: so you must have had quite a chunk of time with them before. . .

P1: yeah

I: so did you take leave?

P1: I took adoption leave for a year, which was quite nice in a way because they came to us at 8 months. So I took 12 months off and then they went to a local nursery, which was really, really, it was run by, it was an old sure start building but it wasn't a sure start nursery, it was run by two women who had been sure start managers, so they were just really on it and they were basically, they were in it for the kids rather than to make money, obviously they needed to make money but it wasn't, they were doing it because they loved working with kids and they attracted

quite a lot of steady staff and old staff. Cos you know you go to some nurseries and its all 18 year old kids and they really, there were some 18 year olds but there were a lot of older women who'd been in it for a long time.

I: so that experience made a difference?

P1: yeah, I think and they also had a massive amount of, every room opened onto the outside so they had a lot of indoor outdoor stuff which especially for *son*, he needs.

I: Yeah

P1: so that, so yeah that was really nice and also by that point they were rising two and they were kind of ready.

I: Yeah

P1: to go in

I: Did they settle well there?

P1: they settled really well there, the main issues we had were on the sort of, what do you call it? like the warm up. . . the induction. . . where we had to leave after an hour, they really weren't happy about that.

I: No

P1: and then they were sometimes clingy in the morning but not massively clingy and we used to just manage it by having breakfast there, so they were so starving they didn't really want me they wanted food [laughter]

I: [laughter]

P1: they'd be like oh ok bye, you know what about me? [laughter] they do still sometimes cry but they were.

I: when they first started did you tell the staff there that they were adopted?

P1: yeah

I: right

P1: we've always been really open about that, yeah, yeah, we've always shared that, we've always shared it with them. They don't know what the word adopted means but they know they were in *birth Mum's* tummy not in my tummy and they know that they lived with *foster carers* and then they came to live with us forever, and that's what the judge decided, they know all that

I: yeah

P1: they've got half siblings, they're woollier on that, they don't really get that.

I: is it a bit further removed?

P1: It's too removed but they don't really understand what siblings are because they don't see themselves, because they're always referred to as twins not your brother or your sister

I: Yeah

P1: do you know what I mean, maybe it's a word we need to start using with them.

I: Yeah

P1: They're such a unit, that they just don't quite

I: no one else would fit into that maybe or they just can't grasp that concept?

P1: Yeah

I: Yeah

P1: so it's a bit, so yeah they've always done alright.

I: mmm

P1: They haven't . . . you know we're lucky I don't think they have got attachment issues really, i think, *son* certainly has emotional regulation issues, he goes up and down faster than most kids I know but they haven't got attachment issues.

I: it makes a difference

P1: it makes a massive difference and I think with kids, I think we were really lucky, they were removed at birth, they had a really strong attachment to their foster carers and of course they had a massive upheaval at 8 months when the rug was pulled from under them, but then they, I would say in a way that they attached to us faster than we attached to them.

I: ok

P1: in a way, don't get me wrong I loved them

I: no no

P1: I would have, if someone had tried to take them away I would have fought tooth and nail but equally they were kind of. . .

I: I suppose they were more reliant on you

P1: yeah I guess they were more reliant on my because they were babies

I: yeah, Yeah cos I remember thinking, because it took me a while I think, cos I kind of remember a specific moment where I was like oh my god I would do anything for this child you know like

P1: yeah that real attachment

I: did you have any kind of moment?

P1: Yeah I definitely, I definitely remember it increasing incrementally

I: Yeah

P1: Yeah to begin with, you're just getting through the day, it's like feed, bottles, nappy, feed, bottle, nappy der, der-der [laughter] and oh I need to eat and it's just oh god am I meant to make tea as well. [Laughter]

I: [Laughter]

P1: I don't think I was depressed. . . it was quite interesting because my cousin adopted a little boy about the same time as me and she's got a birth daughter

I: yeah

P1: and then adopted *name* and she on reflection she was definitely depressed post *name*, he came to them at two. I don't think I was depressed, I think it was just hard sometimes.

I: a big shock to the system?

P1: A shock to the system and just knackard.

I: Yeah

P1: do you know what I mean? I was older, I was 42, I was physically and emotionally knackard but I wouldn't have said I was depressed.

I: Yeah, yeah.

P1: if that makes sense but it was just, it was knacker. But I do, It was amazing, it was amazing and I think one of the things, one of the daft things I remember, because they came in the winter, hanging out their, you know like the baby vests, the white vests on the line for the first time and just crying because I'd waited so long to do that, do you know what I mean. It's like things like that that just stick in my head. That sort of, that, that was probably my you know, moment in a way, you know like they're there. It was funny because they came with loads of clothes, perfectly lovely clothes from the foster carers and I got rid of all of them.

I: oh right, ok

P1: and it was about . . they were all in hand me downs, but they were still hand me downs that other people had given them. It was something about the fact that I'd chosen them and even though they were chosen from hand me downs, it was really weird because it just wasn't my style and it no longer is my style [Laughter] as they wear clothes that they choose unfortunately, but it was somehow important that, it was like a claiming thing almost, it was about, yeah, because I would never have dressed *son* in a tracksuit like that, do you know what I mean?

I: Yeah

P1: like it was a perfectly nice outfit and he looked perfectly cute in it but that's not ever what I . . .

I: was it something about kind of belonging?

P1: Yeah I think so and yeah, yeah . . .

I: about being part of you maybe and being a family?

P1: about them looking like my kids and not someone else's kids I think somehow

I: Yeah

P1: Its weird, its really weird but I remember, I know other people who have said similar things that's its sort of, its not about being ungrateful

I: no no its not

P1: I've passed those clothes on to other people who have worn them, you know what I mean but I think its something about, you know we haven't got rid of everything, you know we've kept the toys and we've kept the blankets, it was just something about the clothes, I just wouldn't dress my kid like that.

I: Yeah I think maybe you need to have that connection both emotionally and visually, you know you need to kind of see that they belong to you and feel that they belong to you maybe?

P1: yeah, I don't know but it was definitely, it was a definite, I don't think *husband* gave a shit [Laughter]

I: [Laughter] So how was *husband* through it all then?

P1: He was fine, I mean he, I think it helped in a way because he's a teacher and he took two weeks paternity leave when they came, or adoption leave, and then it wasn't that long until Christmas and then he had another two weeks. . . so it sort of helped like that. I mean it was really hard for him, I think. . . because they were

much more mummy-centric but then it really helped them, probably over the first summer, he had six weeks off, do you know what I mean? And I think that sort of thing really. . .

I: yeah I think I found that with my husband we, I remember us going away quite early on and just that time together made such a massive difference.

P1: I think it was funny because I think he, I mean *husband* is a primary teacher and he's definitely, he's like coming into his own now, do you know what I mean, whereas I work with adults now but I do a lot of work with pre-schoolers so that was more my age in terms of . . . you know you can sort of see now what he does with them. You know he's not that good at sitting on the floor playing with them, whereas that's very much what I did. At one point *son*, have you heard of Hammon, where you kind of repeat, it is a sort of speech therapy programme that looks at language delay, you know the child says truck and you would say oh yes it's a truck, it's a blue truck and then you would kind of. . . and then at one point *Son* went Mummy stop copying me [laughter], being a speech therapist you know I can't help it [laughter]. . . so yeah, they both talked quite early [laughter] they didn't have a choice.

I: Do you find the impact of their early experience, do you still see that now?

P1: I don't know if it's that early experience but I do worry about the genetic background if that makes sense.

I: Ok

P1: Their birth Dad, he's a nasty piece of work. You know he was the reason they were removed basically.

I: Right

P1: because of domestic violence, we haven't shared that, we feel like, I'm telling you because its anonymous and it doesn't matter but our family and friends, a part from my sister because she's named in our will for who they would go to so she knows but we don't tell family, friends, people. We told school because we thought it was important for school to know and to know the reason why they were removed because I feel like it is their story and if they want to share it when they're older that's fine but I don't want everyone getting to know their story and they don't really. . . up to now its been you know *birth Mum* couldn't keep you safe

birth mum couldn't look after you but we've not said because *birth dad* beat the crap out of her and she kept letting him back when told not to and blah blah blah, or advised not to. . . so. . . I worry certainly about sort of *son* violence and aggression in terms of his birth, the kind of genetics with birth dad and his dad being in that young offenders unit and is in and out of prison now and social workers don't know where he is anymore.

I: Right

P1: I think if they went to prisons they probably would do to be fair. So I always right for letterbox to both of them separately but we get a letter back from *birth mum* a year but we've had one from *birth dad* but they don't even deliver the letter now but I still write so it's on file so should he ever gets in touch and also should the twins ever ask when they're older it's there. . . So. . . I worry about that more than their early experience

I: right ok, so their genetic

P1: if that makes, so I worry, I worry about that more than

I: I mean why. . .

P1: because he gets so angry about things and so, he gets so cross about nothing, so cross about nothing and that worries me. Although its interesting that he doesn't do that at school

I: ok

P1: so he can to a degree control it because he doesn't, well the only time they've seen it is at pick up with me, he doesn't do it in class, he's a model child and that, in terms of, he had a really good teacher, because he was in the school nursery for a year, so he and *daughter* were on the same carpet because they had two carpets so they had this wonderful teacher *name* who was just brilliant who completely got him. . . erm. . . and you know I went in because we were having loads of problems with his behaviour at home because I think she. . . although I think he was very good in school, he was acting out at home this sort of anger and frustration

I: in terms of his anger and frustration was that related to school or just. . .?

P1: I don't know, I find it really hard to pinpoint exactly what it is sometimes it's just about life. . .you know it's just. . . because he would trot off into school happily

enough so I don't think its because he doesn't like it, it's he's almost cross because he has been there.

I: Yeah

P1: Its like he's missing out on something here

I: Aww

P1: you know I think he finds that hard but he's just very quick to blow, it can be . . . we can be having a lovely time and he'll do something and he won't be happy about it and he'll blow. . . and then he'll be back down again. *Daughter* is more of a sort of similar whereas he's just up and down, up and down. I can see *daughter* will have. . . you know I'm dreading *daughter* as a teenager [laughter]. *Son* is very open, he's very honest, he wears his heart on his sleeve and if he doesn't like it he doesn't like it and his sort of natural volume is loud, he's a quite loud kid but when angry its ear splittingly loud.

I: It must be difficult to manage that.

P1: and that's hard, I mean. . . so when he's in nursery *teacher* they did a carpet time about kind hands and disco fingers and de de de de de and it's still up and they did friend of the week and *daughter* took hers down, she pulled it down but *son's* is still up there and he knows because *son* has the best disco fingers and he said that's when I was being violent. . .and

I: Oh

P1:I went in and I said to the TA, I've got to tell you this, and she said I've never used the word violent and I said, I'm sure you didn't but he knows. His verbal reasoning is quite good and he knows, he completely knows and he has an answer for everything, you know like, if I cant do that, if you don't let me watch that programme I'm going to break the tele, if you break the tele then we wont have a tele and then you wont be watching any programmes. We will because Daddy likes watching sports so he will buy another tele and. . . he's right because that is exactly what would happen [laughter]

I: yeah

P1: so. . . whereas last year he had a really shit teacher. . .erm. . . she was just, she was known in the school to be crap.

I: You know you mentioned obviously the nursery teacher was. . .

P1: the nursery teacher was amazing and the reception teacher was rubbish, *daughter* had an amazing reception teacher and *son* had a rubbish one and I wish it had been the other way round.

I: right, why was that?

P1: it was just because *daughter* is more motivated to do reading, writing all of those things, she would have done them where ever she was.

I: Yeah

P1: so she has completely flown with *teacher* and is reading fluently, you know, whatever the word is

I: she's where she is expected

P1: yeah she's expected, she's on target she's reading really well, she's motivated by it, she spends her whole life writing notes, you know, that's just what she loves to do. . . and if. . . you know she likes it and she's motivated by it and she wants to do it. She'd have done that with whoever. Whereas *son* doesn't like doing that, basically they split them in reception because it is the school policy to split twins.

I: They have a policy on that?

P1: they don't have a policy, I've yet to see a written policy [laughter] and I think in retrospect I wish I had challenged it more.

I: ok

P1: erm. . . because I think *son* in particular, found it really hard. I think *daughter* quite liked it

I: Yeah ok.

P1: I think going forward I don't think it is necessarily a bad thing. In retrospect, I think they needed more. . . erm. . . I would have pushed for more support for *son*.

I: What do you think their reasoning was behind that?

P1: that's just what they did with any twin. . .but they claim it's policy but you know I'd love to see the policy.

I: yeah you know why. . .

P1: but it was really difficult you see with *Son* to know whether it was that or whether it's just the teacher

I: Arr ok

P1: so a good example of the crapness is parents evening – trying to explain to her the problems we are having with him at home . . . 'oh I don't see any of that in school blah blah blah that's great they don't see it in school but it is an issue at home. . . 'do you think he could have an attachment disorder?' [laughter]

I: that's what she said to you?

P1: Yeah. . . I just said no I don't think he has got an attachment disorder and I phoned the deputy, you see the irony being that the school have quite a lot of adoptive kids there *school name* in *area name* so I phoned the deputy head because she had put on some training on attachment for the parents of adoptive kids like a month before and I knew they were rolling out that training for the teaching staff

I: Ok

P1: but I thought I'm going to have to phone and tell her that, you know when you can hear, she didn't say it but you know when you can hear from someone's voice 'Oh Fuck' [laughter] she didn't say that but you know when you hear an intake of breath and she was brilliant to be fair and she was going like, thank you for telling me, that shouldn't be happening, we wouldn't tell a child, we wouldn't tell a parent we think your child is autistic, do you know what I mean you just and you know I said it's fine for me and *husband* because we are sound enough in our clinical opinions and know enough about it to know that's not the case but for another adoptive parent that could send them over the edge. Do you know what I mean?

I: Yeah

P1: you just don't say that to an adoptive parent

I: No,

P1: because that's the fear isn't it, you know you just don't do that.

I: It is

P1: you know you just don't do that

I: So what do you think that was about, was that she had been on this training?

P1: she hadn't been on it yet, but she was just trying to give us a reason and almost like make it our problem not hers.

I: right

P1: and because *son* didn't meet expectations and *husband* said, so what are you going to do about it and she said nothing [laughter], I thought I was going to have to physically restrain *husband* from like lynching her over the table,

I: nothing?

P1: nothing. So she was just crap she was just so awful, she was just so awful and then, so this was sort of towards May time. The attachment thing was before that and then there was an incident when they had started giving them homework which I disagree with anyway so, and unusually because my attitude on it was if they only have to write a sentence and draw a picture, my attitude was do you want to do it? *Daughter* would invariably say yes and *son* would say no and that's fine and we left it at that. And Jack really unusually had done it and it was in his bag, because he's also worked out that with reading books, if I don't put my reading book in the thing then I don't have to change it and if I don't change it now you won't make me read it at home, so he'd worked all that out.

I: wow

P1: so equally the homework book hadn't gone in, so I had said to the TA who was also crap, erm that *son's* book is in his book bag, his homework book is in his book bag so will you please, you know he has done it, oh well if I have time, I said well if you could make time and it's really hard isn't it drop off because all the parents are around and it was bedlum, if you could make time that would be really helpful going I'm going to kill this woman. So I said, *teacher* is aware of the issues with homework for *son* so please can you make time. Because I'd already spoken to *teacher* and told her I'm not having an argument with *son* about homework, if you want him to do it, you make that the motivator from school, I'm not arguing with him about it and then she said, you know what I'll do is I'll erm I'll show him some other children's books, so he can see what other children are doing and I just went no! don't do that and left the building and I got on the phone to *husband* and I was so mad, I was in tears and I was just livid, just livid because it was like the final straw of like loads of things and I was like you need to speak to school, you're a teacher, you sort it and speak to school and so we saw the deputy head *name* who was new and really on it and she had him in that Friday afternoon and talked it through and she agreed that she would do some stuff with *son*, not on a 1:1 but

with like a few of his friends. . .erm. . . we talked about my dad had picked up on that fact that he wouldn't read for my dad because I don't want to get it wrong so it was almost like a fear of failure, low self-esteem around reading all of those things so she was brilliant with him. She just did a few sessions with him, and they were just brilliant and they came, so she took him off with his friends because *school name* has got an amazing outdoor, its got woods, its got amazing outdoor space, she took him in the woods and they did a word search and they made sentences out of the words all about this monster called cheeky and they all got a certificate and she was also using *son* as a bit of a guineapig because it think she knows there were problems in that class and she kind of demonstrating what you could be doing and it benefited *son* hugely but I'm not naïve it was proving a point [laughter]to the teaching staff as well but that's fine because for the first time he came out of class buzzing which was just lovely and then she did another session with him and some friends where they had to go on a treasure hunt because the monster had stolen a bear and they had to read sentences and go round school.

I: So what do you think it was about that work that made min feel buzzing?

P1: it was exciting, there was a reward after it and there was loads of praise, she let him take his bow and arrow in to shoot the words in the woods, do you know what I mean? It was very child centred not sit down and read it. Whereas we'd had a thing with *teacher* where he came home and he said I wrote sentences and I said oh that's amazing *teacher* must have been so proud, No because I didn't leave finger spaces . . .oh for fucks sake. And I went in and said basic child development that you need to give praise and I'm sure by the end of year 2 he'll be doing finger spaces and I just lost it and she [deputy head] was like, take the pressure off, and so over May half term she sent him, it was like Cheeky the Monster set him two challenges, one of which he chose to do which was go on a treasure hunt and he actually wrote it and he was just given stuff in a way that he has never been motivated before and when we got home from camping cheeky the monster had written him a letter that was here and she had written it to him and *daughter* so she just, it made such a difference, such a difference.

I: Yeah

P1: so that was really, you know, really positive and now he's got a really really good teacher and he's coming out of school, you know he's been star of the week already and I know more about *current teacher* than I ever knew about *previous teacher* which to me says it all, do you know what I mean, Oh *current teacher* likes chips and her favourite flavour of crisps is cheese and onion but you know I couldn't tell you any of that about *previous teacher*. . . I tried to keep a really open mind about his teacher last year because various people had said she's rubbish but you know new child, new year de de de you know she is she's rubbish and I'm not alone in that.

I: it sounds like it's something to do with her maybe picking up on the negative or . . .

P1: Yeah I don't know I think she's just crap [laughter] I genuinely do, I just think she's. . . because I know other parents who's kids aren't adopted you know and it was actually the head of Ed Psych in *local authority* I was in a meeting and she's a governor and I said oh, I didn't realise her kids were at *name of school* and I said oh congratulations on becoming a governor and she said how do you know I said oh my kids are at *name of school* she said where, I've got twins in reception one with *teacher name* and *teacher name*. She said *teacher name* the dessert year, ohhh [laughter]

I: it doesn't give you much hope

P1: No, no but we're past that now and he's got a really good teacher. Whereas it's been quite funny with *daughter* because she's found settling into year 1 much harder because she's also got a really good teacher but she loved her teacher so much last year and so she's just not *previous teacher*. Whereas *teacher* who she's got is a really lovely teacher, you know ive heard loads of really good things about her but I think for *daughter*. . . *daughter* is much more of a . . . much more of a home bird in a way so if we go camping, we like camping, *son* will be like a pig in pig muck, outside, filthy, loving it de de de de de. *Daughter* would probably rather play with like little figures in the tent, mostly but she'd really rather be at home and I don't even you know you think is that about adoption and I don't think it is, I think that's just her.

I: Yeah

P1: so until she knows whats expected of her and what the routine is . . . because shes been quite tearful in the morning you know at drop off and in school I think she is finding it harder. . .she just doesn't quite know whats expected of her, whereas last year wasn't such an issue because she used to love *previous teacher*

I: so for her. . .

P1: the teacher is really key. I think for *current teacher* she will, I think, you know, she will love her, she's lovely but at the moment though she's still sort of grieving *previous teacher*. Like we had to go and hug her on the way out the other day, you know what I mean, she's just, it's that transition from one to another for her and that's

I: And you were saying that's just her rather than to do with adoption?

P1: And that's juts her, I don't think its trauma, I don't think its adoption, I just think its just, you know *daughter* is much slower to warm up with people generally, you know what I mean.

I: Yeah

P1: You know she just spends longer sussing people out, whereas *son* is much more out there

I: Yeah

P1: I think it's just. .

I: different personalities?

P1: just different personalities, yeah they are really quite different personalities. I think it's for her just. . . yeah it's just getting used to knowing what the rules are knowing what is expected and then she will be fine.

I: Yeah

P1: she's sort of nervous when she doesn't know that.

I: So having clear routines is helpful for her?

P1: Yeah, I'd say for both, for all children its helpful [laughter] yeah, we're only on week one of this term really aren't we?

I: It's still early days

P1: early days, I think it is just

I: getting used to that change

P1: yeah, but you know. . . i think you know. . . I think just that typical, boys just play with whoever is there, I could tell you who *daughters* little group of friends are but I couldn't tell you who *son's* are because I think he just plays with whoever and I don't think he plays on his own. Every report we get through is like he's really sociable, he plays with other kids blah blah blah but they literally just do oh I'm kicking a football, oh your kicking a football, lets kick that ball together, whereas girls are much more clique even at 5, I think they do. . . I know there was an issue last year with *daughter* being called a witch.

I: Aww

P1: but again it was funny because it was one little boy as we came out of school with him, we just happened to be walking out of school with him and his mum and out of nowhere he said, everybody is calling *daughter* a witch. . . and his mother and I said, that's not very kind. So I called *Headteacher* and she said, I know where that has come from, *daughter* had written, as she does on everything *name and first initial of surname* on something and three kids had, and school hadn't told me about it which is fine because I expect school to manage stuff like that, so they had written is a witch underneath.

I: Aww

P1: and they'd promised that *daughter* didn't know about it and they'd had to clean it off and her words were the girl was devastated and let's just say the two boys knew they were in trouble [laughter] and I just thought, well its obviously not stopped

I: No

P1: because they're still doing it so she phoned me back and she goes, don't tell anyone but we didn't do maths today, we did circle time about how we talk to our friends and I just thought perfect you know dealt with, sorted because I think given the bit that worried me was I didn't want to tell *teacher* because I didn't want to get people into trouble, so she did a thing on how it's important to tell the teachers or the TAs and actually helping your friends de de de. That seems to be resolved but I suppose that's still in the back of my mind, is she worried in school because there's still, there are some very strong characters in her class and *daughter* is quite,

she's not quiet at home but she's quite quiet in class and whether she. . . she's not feeling quite comfortable yet, I don't know.

I: Ok

P1: but she. . . yeah I'm just not sure and I just worry more with girls with the. . . oh I don't like that or you like that or I don't, or you've got the wrong headband on or, do you know what I mean, there's all of that boys don't do

I: Girls have to negotiate a lot I think, it's more complex

P1: yeah it really is, it really is

I: Yeah

P1: so I do just, I'm keeping my eye on it but she also *daughter*. . . she sort of quite good at standing up for herself, I think people often think that *son* is the dominant one because he is louder but actually *daughter* if she doesn't want to do it she won't do it. If she's doing it with *son* it's because she wants to do it. If she doesn't want to do it [laughter] you could do all the persuading in the world and she won't do it [laughter]. It's not as unequal as it often looks to. . .

I: She's quietly assertive [laughter]

P1: he might be shouting all the instructions but she's only following them because she wants to [laughter]. . .so that's. . . so I think with school, I think we're lucky, I think there are, there's another little girl who is adopted in *sons* class and you know and through the school. . . I don't know what the numbers are because I'm not privy to that information but there are quite a few and that I think helps cos it's not and you know when you are in reception they obviously do bring baby photos they're very much bring photos of you as a baby or a toddler.

I: Right ok

P1: I just thought was really good because really

I: they've made that adjustment

P1: they've made that adjustment and stuff which I thought was really. . . really positive and I mean I don't know what they do further up the school but I thought that in itself I thought was really positive and. . . really nice. . . we're lucky because their foster carer gave us loads of photos on a CD so we have got them but it was nice that you know because I don't know what Kate's circumstances are do you know what I mean, so it's nice that they already said that to people so you don't

have to go I don't have any photos of them as a baby so I thought that was good and I don't know. . . but I think that's really good that they put on attachment training for the teachers its really positive. . . and they did another thing last year with *name of another school* because they've also got a lot of adoptive parents there on life story work, a little workshop. . . so not frequent, I think maybe there were two things last year, maybe three, one I couldn't go to so maybe three things last year. So you know that's really positive.

I: Is there anything specific that you feel they have done well in terms of your children with them being adopted? You know is there anything you think needed to be particularly different?

P1: No I don't feel that there is anything that they've needed to do specifically for them, I think *husband's* frustration for example is that. . . cos he's. . . he's more target driven than I am because that's his bread and butter that's what he knows about, he's in primary education of course he knows about all these targets and he goes well what are they going to use the pupil premium on then to support *son* if he needs it. . . and I think that is the frustration that there wont be much pupil premium at *school name* because there aren't many kids who would be eligible for it because it's a very white middle class school really erm. . .and it's. . . its kind of like well if he needs it I'm not sure how we would get hold of it.

I: Right

P1: do you know what I mean because it's swallowed up in a bigger pot, do you know what I mean, so I fail to see how its benefitting my kid. And that's fine at the moment because im not sure they need it and im kind of waiting to see how *son* gets on this year. Say he still, because I feel with *son* its not that he cant read it's that he wont read.

I: Yeah

P1: Do you know what I mean, I don't think there a specific thing, he's to little to tell anyway but I don't, I don't feel that, its almost his selfesteem and all of those things, I don't want to get it wrong I don't want to do it he's also bloody bored of those rubbish books [laughter] you know he rather, you know he's used to me reading him, reading to him in quite an interesting way with voices and de de de de de you know he loves being read to more so than *daughter*. *daughter*will, he will sit

you know, I read myself to sleep let alone him [laughter] you know he'll be read to all day. . . so it's not. . . and he retains the information so you know he can resight, he'll read the story back in terms of repeating it because I think he's just bored of having 'yum yum I will get you'. It's the Billy Goats Gruff and he know it's not the Billy Goats Gruff because that's not the Three Billy Goats Gruff, he knows.

I: Its not the right . . .

P1: they don't just say yum yum I will get you, trip trap trip trap run away, what ever it was run along do you know what I mean so you can sort of. . . I think. . . I think if he. . .it was funny because he was like aww I've got to read my reading book because I promised *teacher* and you must keep a promise, do you know what I mean so I think it will be and he's actually read it, which is shocking behaviour but he's read his reading book. I think, I think, I kind of feel that with the right teacher this year he will probably just catch up and zoom along but if he doesn't for any reason then I think it is going to be an interesting battle how we get the support he needs.

I: and do you feel it will be a battle?

P1: Yeah

I: right

P1: its really. . . it's a really tricky one because *husband*. . . because he's deputy head in *another locality* and the school he's at has links to the school the twins are at, fairly distant and they're not part of a, they're in separate teaching alliances, so they're not that linked but he still meets with the head and his assistant head has just gone to *name of school* for a secondment to cover maternity leave so . . . it's kind of, there are kind of links there so it would probably be easier for us to push the buttons than it maybe would for other parents rightly or wrongly

I: Mmm because you've got some influence there?

P1: Yeah sadly and that shouldn't be about that, it really shouldn't be about that but I think its. . . it is hard isn't it cos like education is *husbands* bag, he was very much the driver in them going to that school and I felt I suppose I didn't have a leg to stand on but equally if there was a health issue he would completely bow to me

I: Yeah

P1: Do you know what I mean, because that's my bag and I know about that and I would make every decision on that.

I: Yeah

P1: so I think you just have to . . .you have to. . . [indecipherable 3 seconds]. . . exactly, exactly you know you can't, I think *school name* is, Ofsted says it's outstanding, I don't think it's outstanding I think it coasts.

I: Right

P1: I think *husband's* school is outstanding because they get results that are only marginally worse than *school name* but that's in *another locality* as opposed to *local area*[laughter] but I think would I want my kids at *husband's* school, no because I don't think they should be at the same school as their dad

I: Yeah [laughter]

P1: But yeah I think it's. . . but equally, you know, they're all really nice kids there and they're getting. . . you know I suppose they're making. . .good friends there so and they are making friends and they go to people's houses and they come, people come here you know and all that so that. . .that's all positive. You know I worry about. . . you know I think sometimes, they really do fight my two, they really really fight and you know we had a looked after, one of *daughter's* friends from school because her mum was desperate and my two had a full on fight, and you see this kid go [laughter] because you know *friend's name* is *daughter's* age and she's got a little sister so they just don't. . . I think it's harder when they're the same age because you can't say don't beat up your little brother

I: No [laughter]

P1: he's only little don't do that, cos they're not. . .so. . .

I: it must be challenging

P1: it is a challenge. . .i've asked you to stop fighting and I've told you you're going to get hurt and if you now hurt each other. . . don't moan to me about it, because I've asked you to stop, you've chosen not to stop both of you

I: Yeah

P1: I was speaking to my sister whose kids aren't adopted and it sounds really weird, she goes I'm in the toilet because the girls are fighting and it's making no difference if I'm there or not [laughter]. . . fair enough [laughter]. In terms of school. . . I think

we're lucky in that I don't think they've needed kind of allowances if you like for want of a better word, made so far, they really haven't, they are, you know they go into school no worse or no better than other kids that aren't adopted who are wailing and nashing teeth far more than my two are, do you know what I mean? You know they're a bit clingy sometimes, they a bit. . . you know I'm sure when the childminder takes them they don't do any of that.

I: you know you mentioned about the really good, was it the nursery teacher?

P1: Yeah

I: that she got *son*, I think that's what you said, she really got him.

P1: Yeah

I: erm what do you mean by that?

P1: she just understood that you know. . . I think she just got kids I don't think it was just *son*

I: oh ok

P1: I think she just got, you know she's incredibly skilled and you know she just also got parents and I think that was the difference.

I: right

P1: you know she was willing to listen to me and my concerns and she got, she got that *son* what the things he liked and the things he didn't like, that you're meant to encourage them to sit and write their name every morning and you know we never did that [laughter] that was never going to happen in a million years, you know and she got that, but she equally got that he'll stand up and tell you a story and he'll do, you know

I: she recognised his strengths

P1: Yeah and that he's you know like one of *son's* strengths I think is he will just get on and play and he'll play, and that he's willing, but he's not so fixed in his idea that he wont develop it. So he'll play and if someone else says and we do this and he'll be like oh yeah, you know lets make it like, you know what I mean, so he's not, no I'm building a castle like this, yeah yeah no we can make it a pirate ship, do you know what I mean and he'd be happy to build that and take that on and she just sort of got that about him but I think she also, I think she got parents as well and that was the difference with *daughter's* teacher, she got kids but she also got parents,

do you know what I mean so like, to go back to last year you know, until we complained, *teacher's name* *daughter's* teacher was always on the door in the morning, *teacher's name* was in the class and the TA was on the door

I: Right, Ok

P1: so that was one of the things that when we met with the deputy head, as a mother of twins it is more obvious to me than any other parent in school that difference between these two classes, I'm not even experiencing it a year of two later, I'm experiencing it every day

I: Yeah

P1: you know and I said *teacher's name* is always there and you can tell her what. . . you know she had a bad night's sleep, that's all you need to say sometimes, you know she had a nightmare last night and she may be a bit sleepy, that's all you need to say sometimes

I: having that access and good communication

P1: she hid in the classroom because she didn't want to talk to us

I: and how did that make you feel as a parent?

P1: just cross, I mean for god sake this is reception, this is not year 6, its reception you need to be there because actually as a reception teacher in my view. . . you have to manage the parents as much as you have to manage the kids and I just think that you know you just have to you know, you might not like talking to parents, you might absolutely rather be in your classroom, I get that I completely get that and I think that kids quite liked her I don't think they didn't like *teacher's name* you know I don't think she will be on *son's* list of favourite teachers but he didn't dislike her but you can't hide in your class you've got to be there, it's not good enough. . . unless it's the school policy that it's thr TAs. . but you cant have the teacher in one class and the TA in another you just cant not every day, not unless its your PPA or what ever you call it, you can't.

I: Yeah

P1: it just used to make me feel really cross and a bit sad for *son* really and I wasn't alone in that

I: No, no

P1: So we, you know that was one of the things we raised and after that she was on the door

I: oh right

P1: she must have bloody hated me [laughter] she must have never been so glad to see the back of somebody [laughter] but you know to be fair to her, we met with *name* the deputy and two weeks later we met with her and *daughter's* teacher and the deputy altogether and that must have been a hard meeting for her to be fair because she knew we'd complained. . . but you know

I: Did it go ok?

P1: It was fine actually, yeah , I mean I wasn't, I think, I think because I'm used to being in difficult meetings at work, I kind of go into work mode.

I: Yeah

P1: so I go with my list, and I go with this and I go with that and I don't get that, I might be really emotional afterwards but in it, I just, I stop being a mum and I start being a professional.

I: do you think that helps then? Being a professional?

P1: massively, I think it massively helps and I think, I really feel for parents that have no experience of that, I really do and it's funny talking to a colleague at work who adopted at the same time, if we can't navigate this bloody system, and we're in a system, we're in the NHS, we're used to systems, we're used to. . . we work jointly with social services and we can't navigate it and get what we want how the hell. . . does. . . you someone that works at Tesco, no disrespect to anyone who works at Tesco but how does somebody who works at Tesco and . . . do that because that's so out of your sphere. . . I mean don't get me wrong, people do get it and they get good at it very fast but I sometimes think that we make parents, you know I work now with adults, who are now really difficult parents, and I think what I've learnt, one of the things I've learnt we made those parents because we made their life so difficult they had to fight for every single bloody thing, all the way through childhood, so guess what through adulthood they're still fighting because that's what you do when you need to fight for your children you do fight for them, you would, you know you'll,

I: Do anything

P1: you'll do anything and actually you often end up being better informed than the professionals because it's motivating to you, sort of motivating to you in terms of your fight for your child to read background stuff and to read this and that says that so deal with it and we're lucky that we haven't, don't get me wrong, we've fought in terms of we've gone in and complained but we haven't had to fight in terms of I know some people have had to fight for. You know if I thought that *son* and *daughter*, you know if *son* behaves in school in the way he behaves at home we'd be having massive issues in school, but he doesn't he's a model child in school luckily because I would rather he behave like that at home than in school.

I: Yeah, yeah.

P1: erm we'd be having, you know he would have been excluded because I think the tolerance in nice middle class schools for tricky behaviour is low.

I: mmm

P1: he probably would end up at *husband's school* because they don't exclude no matter what the kids do [laughter]. . . so I think it's, we haven't had to fight but if we did we would, bloody hell and we'd be, you know you get good at it, and also you've got the resources to if we need it we'll get a solicitor, do you know what I mean, we're fortunate to be able to do that or if they did go to another school we've got a car and we can drive them further and we can do, we can do all of those things and actually other parents don't have those options and resources and I think its really, really hard. I mean I think it is really positive you know the government thing that you can choose, you know we are one group of parents in the country that honestly has choice about where their child goes to school, we really are because I remember feeling quite guilty in the playground when, oh you know, cos they can go to nursery but they're not guaranteed a place in reception and I don't know if they'll get in, oh god. . .er sorry mine are taking up two places [laughter] you know its sort of sorry, yeah, mmm, yeah we probably do live just outside catchment

I: right

P1: so kids get in whose siblings are there from here but most kids who live here wouldn't without a reason get in. So the kids over the road go because they used to live nearer

I: right ok

P1: do you know what I mean, and then the siblings got in kind of thing but you know, its . . . not really worried [laughter], so you know I think, you almost feel a bit guilty

I: nice position to be in but

P1: very nice position to be in but in that playground kind of gossip you feel like, yeah well sorry [laughter] especially when there's two of them, two places gone [laughter] so yeah, but I think that government initiative is really good, I think it, you know I think we're really lucky again in a way they would be fine anywhere, but if they weren't I think being able to choose that is very important and you know who knows when they get to secondary school, that will become more important to have that choice

I: is there anything else you think schools need to know about or should be doing?

P1: I think they need to know about attachment actually, I think all schools should know about that because I think, and I know Timpson's are doing a big campaign

I: Yeah you mentioned that

P1: you know I think they should know about that, I think it's really important and I think you know.

I: what difference do you think it would make knowing about it

P1: I just think its that, I don't think it's just about adopted kids, I think it's about so many kids that I just think it's about making it as normal as you know about autism,

I: yeah

P1: do you know, changing the ethos of the school accordingly and understanding why kids maybe find transition difficult and that its not, I guess and I think that on going impact of trauma and again I feel really privaliged and lucky and so blessed that our kids didn't have that, other than the trauma of their world being turned upside down at eight months, they hadn't been neglected, they weren't, you know they weren't sexually abused, they didn't have fag butts stubbed out on them, they didn't, obviously there would have been in utero stuff. . . you know where they would have had cortisol levels going through the roof

I: yeah

P1: in utero, they didn't witness, they didn't see it, their experience in utero, they didn't experience it as toddlers or young children or any of those things and I think,

and there was a talk I went to on early trauma and that understanding, that actually had that child got ADHD or is it actually the impact of early trauma? So your actually trying to label you know give people labels all the time instead of thinking about what, cos I know, I don't know whether you have seen it or not, the British psychological, the BPS whatever it's called there, erm, it sounds like pmt but it's not they've done a whole new thing. . . I forward it to *name* what the hell is it called, a whole new way of looking at it so instead of giving diagnoses you should be looking at the people's histories and experiences and trying to is it that or is it, I always remember a woman as a student she had a diagnosis of schizophrenia and one day she was telling me what had happened to her in her life and your like bloody hell, I'm amazed you're here let alone having a diagnosis, so is it schizophrenia or is it absolute a reaction to a really, really shit life and I think, I think just because you suffer early life trauma doesn't mean you're going to go on and have a really shit life at all, you know people are resilient and people move on from that, and I think just understanding that, schools understanding that would really help.

I: so understanding trauma and attachment

P1: yeah, I think would make a massive difference and I just think and there was a great, if I get the slides through I'll forward them to you because they were really good from a psychologist, he ended it on something like, there was a great quote from an American psychologist saying all a kid really needs is someone to think they're the best thing ever and there is something about that and I think that's why you warm to certain teachers because you get the feeling that they think your kid is brilliant

I: Yeah

P1: and that what *daughter*' teacher, she made every parent feel like their child was brilliant.

I: Yeah

P1: and I'm sure she had kids who she preferred in that class, cos in a class of thirty you're going to get kids who you really like and kids you think for god's sake. And that's normal, I'm not naïve I'm not expecting every teacher to think my kid is the best thing ever, but I expect you to give me the impression that my child is the best thing ever [laughter]. Does that make sense? Do you know what I mean?

I: yeah

P1: and I don't care that you think he's a little shit.

I: there's something about appreciating them for who they are I think

P1: yeah, yeah and I think it's that child centredness and I do think it's really hard in the education system at the moment because I do. . . I suppose I fundamentally disagree with what the government curriculum is but, I strongly disagree with it, but then, but equally could I home educate my children? No [laughter] we'd be all up for murder [laughter] either them for me or me for them, No. it just can't happen. Do I want my kids in a private school? No, you know, so unless you've got. . . unless you're going to take your kids out of that system you have to go this is the system. The fact that they're learning joined up writing I think is absolutely frigging ridiculous, do you know what I mean? I just think it is absolutely ridiculous. So that's not the teachers fault, that's the. . . pressure from above and unless teachers as a body revolt against that, that's part of the problem, I'm getting on my political soap box, but that's part of the problem with education being political, it's like the NHS being political it just. . . every minister wants to make their mark on it so we're suffering still from Gove, aren't we for education so it's sort of . . . yeah I just think it's ridiculous that they're not all just running around outside

I: Yeah and being children

P1: being children and you know I think I suppose that was part of the reason for choosing *name of school* is that it has this amazing outside you know they call it *name* and *name* or something so they have that and for a city school, it doesn't feel like a city school because it's on the edge of the *name* flood plane, it just doesn't feel, it just doesn't feel like a city school whereas our next, the nearest school to us is *name of school* and is a very very city school, I don't know whether you know it

I: No I don't I'm not familiar with round here.

P1: it's a big school in *local area*, it's a massive old Victorian three story building kind of thing, it feels like a city school with a fenced in playground you know but *Name of school* doesn't feel like that and that's what I like about it, they could use it more productively which is what I think the deputy head was trying to show them [laughter]. You know they do go there once a week and play in the woods and that's

good. So yeah I think we're lucky in that they go there and we're lucky that we don't need to fight for their education.

I: Can I just ask about one more thing, erm. It was about your choice to inform school about them being adopted – what made you . . .

P1: I think we've just always been open and honest about it anyway, you know. . . if I'm stood at the bus stop I don't tell people they're adopted but you know. . . all their friends parents know they're adopted, do you know what I mean, I'm not pretending that they're biologically mine at all because I just think that creates. . . you know when people go oh they look really like you I go that's lovely you say that but they're adopted erm and I just think it is about being. . . just I suppose it's about. . . if they're ever talking about *birth mum's* tummy, that they're not going WHAT! And when they're playing. . . when they're, when they're playing if it comes up in play that they know that because otherwise it would be really . . . or if they talk about *names* that they're, if they're telling bits of their life history. . . and I remember one trainer telling us about giving your children. . . your children always need to know their full history from you by the time they're 11 because after that, that's when they start to look outside but also giving them a version that they're happy to tell rather than the. . . you know we don't need to tell everybody everything but we need to tell, because I think one mum was saying that her daughter was on a school trip and just disclosed far far too much to the mother that she was sat next to on the bus, or what ever, so you don't want. . . but I kind of want them to be proud that we chose them and they're special and that's really special. . . and I just think, I guess I knew, we do about my family and I want them to know. . . don't get me wrong they are my family, they are absolutely my family and their cousins are their cousins and they're not their adoptive cousins and their grandparents are their grandparents but they do have a whole birth family and we always refer to ourselves as the family and birth family as birth family we don't, we normally refer to *birth mum's name* as *birth Mum's name* we don't normally say tummy mummy or anything like that, just you were in *birth mum's name* tummy and that how we, and that probably me more than them but if they said was she our, I'd say yes she's your biological mother, but you know cos *daughter* she wanted the whole how are babies made so we did the whole how are babies made

with me and her in the car, it was hilarious. It was just like very basic but she was like that's disgusting [laughter] and like driving along like five minutes later and she was going that's disgusting [laughter]. So she's never asked since but it was really funny. Only adults do it, oh my god she's going to be saying to *son* you put your willy in here, oh god [laughter] you know they're very aware, you know because they have baths together, they're very aware of their own anatomy and boys and girls anatomy because they've seen each other, like oh god [laughter] only adults, only adults [laughter] [indecipherable 2 seconds] but yeah I just thought it was important that school knew and then we were talking to *headteacher* about you know, *son's* aggression at home and we sort of said about the domestic violence history but we did say to her that is not for the school to know, because I don't think they need to know but I think they need to know but that's just my view, in the same way I think it's important that the kids know they are adopted because there is nothing to hide because we're always, we've just always said it. . . it's never a. . . we, I do letter box, I don't know what it's like in your house but

I: Yeah I do it [laughter]

P1: er. . . I've always done handprints and get them to draw a picture and. . . and I've now started asking them if they want to say anything, so last year was hilarious, *son* said, it's ok that you can't look after us, which was a bit like whooof, and *daughter* said I saw father Christmas on TV which I thought summed up four year olds [laughter] you know what I mean from the really profound to the really inane [laughter] and this year *daughter* was like, oh she wanted put on her picture she was six and I was like *birth Mum* will know you're five, and she was like oh it's a joke [laughter], it's like the father Christmas bit but you know I try and include them in that little way of doing it but, if they don't want to I'm not going to force them to do it, I just think. . . I just think it's important. It's not because I want allowances to be made for them but it's just that's their history and in the same way. . . you know. . . if I was French I would expect them to know I was French.

I: Yeah, it's part of their make up

P1: Yeah exactly or you know if one of their friends mum has really serious mental health issues, you know what I mean, well I would expect them to know that, do you know what I mean, it's just sort of, yeah, I just, I just, yeah it's not about making

allowances for them or anything like that it's just their history and part of who they are much as I'd love to say they are genetically mine, they're not you know, you know. . . they are who they are

I: Yeah

P1: you know I think everybody is different about how open and honest they want to be and how much they feel they can be but we have just always been. . .

I: we've been the same you know, I told my son's school when he first started erm but it's just interesting to hear how different people think and make those decisions about doing that and why and what impact that might have

P1: I think as well because they're not the only kids in the school, it sort of made it easier to do that as well, do you know what I mean, if they were the only adopted kids in the school, it would maybe make them stand out where as they're really not.

I: Yeah, yeah. . . I think there is one other adopted child in my son's school erm but it's not common knowledge, you know like his teacher's know and I don't even know whether all his friends parents know, because I don't go but some of them do the closest ones do but yeah it's just interesting to get your thoughts on that.

P1: you know also you know don't get me wrong, I don't go out telling everybody but you know parents talk to each other as well

I: yeah that's why I said I'm not sure they do or they don't, I don't know if people have said

P1: I'm not bothered, it doesn't bother me

I: No no no

P1: this is just how we have our family

I: yeah It is definitely, we're the same. Is there anything else you feel that you would like to share.

P1: I feel like we're early on in our school journey so it's hard to know

I: are you worried about anything, like do you think about the future and them moving through the education system and how that might be?

P1: I just think that, I do think about it and I think, I suppose I wonder about, I mean you know at this age kids don't judge and I suppose I wonder when they're older whether kids will judge but then it amazes me these days what kids do and don't judge on, you know like *high school name* is where they will probably go to

secondary school, you know have gender neutral toilets, which would have been a massive issue in my school career, do you know what I mean, whereas kids really give a shit about that anymore they really don't you know what I mean, I think I worry more about the whole social media and the ability to find birth parents and birth siblings and all of those things, I worry about that I think more than education, you know but I guess, I suppose you worry more about the impact of peers and yeah, I mean at the end of the day they'll do how they do in education. Do I worry about them getting older, well of course I do, you lose control and that will change things but at least there's that safety net of well they won't be going to *name of high school* and you know at the moment the school I would like them to go to will most likely change in the next 5 years but then at that point another good school will have popped out and you know they can go there. You know and that is really reassuring, and having that control where you can go actually I can try and influence in that way I suppose to a degree which is quite nice place to be. I mean I worry about education and the stresses it puts on kids but not in terms of adoption. What will be will be won't it.

I: It will [laughter] Aww thank you very much

P1: you're very welcome

I: I'm going to stop this now.

Stage 3: Abbreviated transcription of the interview

Jane

1 . . . They came to live with us in November 2013 and the adoption order went
2 through in August '14. . . We did it through S****. We were lucky that we had a
3 really, really, good social worker who was really experienced, who got us. I think it
4 has changed a bit since we did it, but when we did it she just basically did eight chats
5 with themes, and then we had one really random session where she asked us
6 random questions where she hadn't got the information from the conversations. So
7 she was experienced enough to make it a conversation not a series of questions,
8 which was quite a skill. Having done lots of assessments myself with people, that's a
9 real skill. And it was all right and then the wait if you like was getting onto the
10 parenting course that we had to do. But once we'd got on that, it all happened
11 relatively speedily, it was ok.

12 And then they obviously knew about the twins and the possibility of paring
13 them up with us, before they told us because we had a really hilarious conversation
14 about adopting siblings and I was really up for adopting siblings and *Husband*
15 really didn't want to. And then I'll always remember *social worker* going 'but what
16 about twins' and *Husband* said 'Oh twins would be fine' and we both looked at
17 him and went they're siblings [laughter]. And *Husband* was like but that's
18 different [laughter]

19 So they obviously knew about them. So they were the only profile we ever
20 saw because you know when you just read it and you know it's right. And then it was
21 a bit tricky, because they told us about them but . . . there was a final court hearing
22 scheduled for the September and the children's guardian didn't turn up because she
23 was ill. I've never wanted to murder somebody quite so much and then it got put
24 back to November because that's how long it took to reorganise the court, so that
25 was a really long wait, that was hell. So then, then you know it just moves really
26 quickly doesn't it.

27 We found that really hard (*having an idea about what you would or would*
28 *not accept in a child*) because it feels a bit like eugenics. . . I work with people with
29 learning disabilities. *Husband* works with lots of children with challenging

30 behaviours but equally we kind of knew that we wanted a family, not a job and
31 there is a difference and I feel bad saying it. . . I think we were lucky that *social
32 worker* really got that, because you can almost see them going, ooh speech and
33 language therapist, ooh teacher working with kids who challenge, Ooh [laughter]
34 but she also got that it was about family and not a therapy for a very traumatised
35 child who needs more than I think we could give and do our jobs.

36 We had said under three, but we didn't expect to get 8 month old babies, we
37 really didn't, so that was just a bonus. . . You know we were expecting 2 year olds,
38 we really weren't expecting 8 month old babies so that was hard in itself. . . I mean
39 we were lucky because they had been with really good foster carers, really
40 experienced, who had their own teenage kids. . . They were really welcoming to us
41 and they had given them a really good start in life, they had got them into some
42 amazing routines that we just continued. Everyone was just like, bloody hell, they
43 sleep at the same time, and I'm like oh yeah they sleep at the same time but it's
44 nothing to do with me [laughter] but then at the same time it's a bad day when they
45 don't sleep at the same time. . . We were really lucky with all of that. Nights were
46 still hard but that's I think because they were six weeks prem[ature], so again the
47 foster carers had to do it by the book, so they'd been woken for feeds every four
48 hours. . . Well by the time they came to us they didn't need the four hour feeds
49 through the night but they were still, especially *son*, in a four hour pattern which
50 wasn't great [laughter] but, yeah, we got there but it was hard. . . I was so sleep
51 deprived I've probably wiped it from memory, it was all right.

52 . . . I remember going and looking in the middle of the night when they had
53 just come to us and I could just see their little faces and they were like who the hell
54 are you and where the hell am I? I just remember that this little baby just like, I don't
55 know who you are, I don't know where I am and I'm really not happy about this, you
56 know and that's fair enough.

57 But the other aspects were fine, they got there really quickly, but you know it
58 was really interesting they really needed each other. . . There was one day where
59 *Son* had gone to sleep but *daughter* wouldn't go to sleep. So I took her out in
60 the buggy because I had to do some stuff, and *husband* was at home with *son*,
61 got back and *son* was hysterical because he had woken up and *daughter* wasn't

62 there, she came in, fine. . . That was in the really early days so they were still very
63 young . . . but I think it was just like I'm now with someone I don't know, in a house
64 that I don't know and now my sister is gone. . . They fight like cat and dog but
65 they're there for each other massively when they're not sure of something they
66 really want each other. . .

67 It's really nice but they also beat the crap out of each other [laughter]. Even
68 as babies, you know you have the LAC meetings still and we had a LAC meeting and
69 *daughter* had raked the back of *sons* neck, absolutely raked it with her
70 fingernails. And then they [social workers] were late coming, so they had been
71 playing with the pens and *son* had scribbled on the back of his neck which I was
72 like marvellous [laughter] hide the scar [laughter]. And they used to bite each other
73 a lot, *daughter* bit one other child once, but they used to bite each other all the
74 time and they would go to nursery and I was like yeah you'll notice the ring of teeth.
75 It was awful. I think it's just developmental, I think it's just that constant having to
76 share. For both of them one of their first words was 'swop'. It was just 'swop, swop,
77 swop' and that's not a normal first word. But you know, you'd give them two
78 identical blue bricks and they would want what the others got. So yeah, I think it
79 was just crossness with each other and you know I fought with my siblings like cat
80 and dog . . . and they would drive me demented.

81 I took adoption leave for a year, which was quite nice in a way because they
82 came to us at 8 months. So I took 12 months off and then they went to a local
83 nursery. . . It was an old sure start building but it wasn't a sure start nursery. It was
84 run by two women who had been sure start managers, so they were just really on it
85 and they were basically, they were in it for the kids rather than to make money.
86 Obviously, they needed to make money but they were doing it because they loved
87 working with kids and they attracted quite a lot of steady staff and old staff. Cos
88 you know you go to some nurseries and it's all 18 year old kids and there were some
89 18 year olds but there were a lot of older women who'd been in it for a long time. . .
90 Every room opened onto the outside so they had a lot of indoor, outdoor stuff which
91 especially for *son*, he needs. That was really nice and also by that point they were
92 rising two and they were kind of ready. . .

93 They settled really well there, the main issues we had were on . . . the
94 induction. We had to leave after an hour, they really weren't happy about that.
95 Then they were sometimes clingy in the morning but not massively clingy and we
96 used to just manage it by having breakfast there, so they were so starving they
97 didn't really want me they wanted food [laughter] they'd be like oh ok bye. You
98 know what about me? [laughter] they do still sometimes cry. . .

99 We've always been really open about that . . . we've always shared it with
100 them. They don't know what the word adopted means but they know they were in
101 *birth Mum's* tummy not in my tummy and they know that they lived with *foster
102 carers* and then they came to live with us forever, and that's what the judge
103 decided, they know all that. They've got half siblings, they're woollier on that, they
104 don't really get that. It's too removed but they don't really understand what siblings
105 are because . . . they're always referred to as twins not your brother or your sister. .
106 . maybe it's a word we need to start using with them. They're such a unit . . . no one
107 else would fit into that maybe or they just can't grasp that concept.

108 . . . You know we're lucky I don't think they have got attachment issues
109 really, i think, *son* certainly has emotional regulation issues, he goes up and down
110 faster than most kids I know but they haven't got attachment issues. It makes a
111 massive difference. I think we were really lucky, they were removed at birth, they
112 had a really strong attachment to their foster carers and of course they had a
113 massive upheaval at 8 months when the rug was pulled from under them, but I
114 would say in a way that they attached to us faster than we attached to them. . .
115 Don't get me wrong I loved them. If someone had tried to take them away I would
116 have fought tooth and nail. I guess they were more reliant on me because they
117 were babies.

118 . . . To begin with, you're just getting through the day, it's like feed, bottles,
119 nappy, feed, bottle, nappy . . . [laughter] and oh I need to eat and it's just oh god am
120 I meant to make tea as well. [Laughter] I don't think I was depressed. It was quite
121 interesting because my cousin adopted a little boy about the same time as me and
122 she's got a birth daughter and then adopted *name* and on reflection she was
123 definitely depressed post *name*, he came to them at two. I don't think I was
124 depressed, I think it was just hard sometimes. . . I was older, I was 42, I was

125 physically and emotionally knackered but I wouldn't have said I was depressed. If
126 that makes sense but it was just, it was knacking.

127 . . . It was amazing and . . . one of the daft things I remember, because they
128 came in the winter, hanging out their baby vests . . . on the line for the first time and
129 just crying because I'd waited so long to do that. . . Things like that that just stick in
130 my head. That was probably my moment in a way, you know like they're there.

131 It was funny because they came with loads of clothes, perfectly lovely
132 clothes from the foster carers and I got rid of all of them. . . They were in hand me
133 downs, but they were still hand me downs that other people had given them. It was
134 something about the fact that I'd chosen them and even though they were chosen
135 from hand me downs. It was really weird because it just wasn't my style, and it no
136 longer is my style [Laughter] as they wear clothes, that they choose unfortunately.
137 But it was somehow important, it was like a claiming thing almost . . . because I
138 would never have dressed *son* in a tracksuit like that. . . Like it was a perfectly nice
139 outfit and he looked perfectly cute in it but . . . [it's] about them looking like my kids
140 and not someone else's kids. . . It's weird, it's really weird but . . . I know other
141 people who have said similar things that's it's . . . not about being ungrateful. I've
142 passed those clothes on to other people who have worn them. . . You know we
143 haven't got rid of everything, we've kept the toys and we've kept the blankets, it
144 was just something about the clothes, I just wouldn't dress my kid like that. I don't
145 think *husband* gave a shit [Laughter].

146 He [husband] was fine. . . I think it helped in a way because he's a teacher
147 and he took two weeks paternity leave when they came . . . and then it wasn't that
148 long until Christmas and then he had another two weeks. . . I mean it was really hard
149 for him, I think because they were much more mummy-centric but then it really
150 helped them . . . over the first summer, he had six weeks off.

151 I think it was funny because *husband* is a primary teacher and he's
152 definitely coming into his own now. . . Whereas I work with adults now but I do a lot
153 of work with pre-schoolers so that was more my age. . . You know he's not that good
154 at sitting on the floor playing with them, whereas that's very much what I did. . .
155 Have you heard of Hammon? . . . It is a sort of speech therapy programme that looks
156 at language delay. The child says 'truck' and you would say 'oh yes it's a truck', 'it's a

157 blue truck' and then . . . at one point *Son* went 'Mummy stop copying me'
158 [laughter], being a speech therapist you know I can't help it [laughter]. . . They both
159 talked quite early [laughter] they didn't have a choice.

160 I don't know if it's that early experience but I do worry about the genetic
161 background if that makes sense. Their birth Dad, he's a nasty piece of work. You
162 know he was the reason they were removed. . . because of domestic violence. We
163 haven't shared that. . . I'm telling you because its anonymous and it doesn't matter
164 but our family and friends, a part from my sister because she's named in our will for
165 who they would go to so she knows, but we don't tell family, friends, people. We
166 told school because we thought it was important for school . . . to know the reason
167 why they were removed because I feel like it is their story and if they want to share
168 it when they're older that's fine but I don't want everyone getting to know their
169 story. . . Up to now it's been, you know *birth Mum* couldn't keep you safe *birth
170 mum* couldn't look after you but we've not said because *birth dad* beat the crap
171 out of her and she kept letting him back when told not to . . . or advised not to. I
172 worry certainly about *son's* violence and aggression in terms of . . . genetics with
173 birth dad and his dad being in that young offenders unit and is in and out of prison
174 now. Social workers don't know where he is anymore. I think if they went to prisons
175 they probably would do to be fair. So I always write for letterbox to both of them
176 separately but we get a letter back from *birth mum* once a year but we've not
177 had one from *birth dad*. They don't even deliver the letter now but I still write so
178 it's on file so should he ever get in touch and also should the twins ever ask when
179 they're older it's there. I worry about that more than their early experience. . . I
180 worry about that more . . . because he gets so angry about things and he gets . . . so
181 cross about nothing and that worries me. Although it's interesting that he doesn't
182 do that at school. So he can, to a degree control it, because the only time they've
183 seen it is at pick up with me. He doesn't do it in class, he's a model child. . . He was
184 in the school nursery for a year, so he and *daughter* were on the same carpet
185 because they had two carpets. So they had this wonderful teacher *name* who was
186 just brilliant who completely got him. . . I went in because we were having loads of
187 problems with his behaviour at home . . . although he was very good in school, he
188 was acting out at home this sort of anger and frustration. . . I find it really hard to

189 pinpoint exactly what it is, sometimes it's just about life. . . . Because he would trot
190 off into school happily enough so I don't think it's because he doesn't like it. He's
191 almost cross because he has been there. It's like he's missing out on something
192 here. You know I think he finds that hard but he's just very quick to blow. We can
193 be having a lovely time and he'll do something, and he won't be happy about it and
194 he'll blow and then he'll be back down again. *Daughter* is more . . . similar
195 whereas he's just up and down, up and down. . . . You know I'm dreading *daughter*
196 as a teenager [laughter]. *Son* is very open, he's very honest, he wears his heart on
197 his sleeve and if he doesn't like it he doesn't like it. His sort of natural volume is
198 loud, he's a quite loud kid but when angry it's ear splittingly loud. And that's hard. . .
199 So when he was in nursery, *teacher* did a carpet time about kind hands and disco
200 fingers . . . and it's still up. And they did friend of the week and *daughter* took
201 hers down, she pulled it down but *son's* is still up there . . . because *son* has the
202 best disco fingers. And he said that's when I was being violent. I went in and I said
203 to the TA, I've got to tell you this, and she said I've never used the word violent and I
204 said, I'm sure you didn't but he knows. His verbal reasoning is quite good and . . . he
205 completely knows and he has an answer for everything. You know like, 'if you don't
206 let me watch that programme I'm going to break the tele', 'if you break the tele then
207 we won't have a tele and then you won't be watching any programmes'. 'We will
208 because Daddy likes watching sports so he will buy another tele' and he's right
209 because that is exactly what would happen [laughter]

210 . . . The nursery teacher was amazing and the reception teacher was rubbish.
211 *daughter* had an amazing reception teacher and *son* had a rubbish one. I wish
212 it had been the other way round because *daughter* is more motivated to do
213 reading, writing all of those things. She would have done them where ever she was.
214 So she has completely flown with *teacher* and is reading fluently . . . she's on
215 target, she's reading really well, she's motivated by it. She spends her whole life
216 writing notes, that's just what she loves to do. . . . If she likes it and she's motivated
217 by it and she wants to do it, she'd have done that with whoever. Whereas *son*
218 doesn't like doing that. Basically they split them in reception because it is the school
219 policy to split twins. They don't have a policy, I've yet to see a written policy
220 [laughter] and I think in retrospect I wish I had challenged it more because *son* in

221 particular, found it really hard. I think *daughter* quite liked it. Going forward I
222 don't think it is necessarily a bad thing. In retrospect, I think I would have pushed
223 for more support for *son*.

224 . . . They claim it's policy but you know I'd love to see the policy. But it was
225 really difficult with *Son* to know whether it was that or whether it's just the
226 teacher. So a good example of the crapness is parents evening, trying to explain to
227 her the problems we are having with him at home. 'Oh I don't see any of that in
228 school' . . . That's great they don't see it in school but it is an issue at home. 'Do you
229 think he could have an attachment disorder?' [laughter] I just said, 'No I don't think
230 he has got an attachment disorder.' and I phoned the deputy. You see the irony
231 being that the school have quite a lot of adoptive kids there *school name* in *area
232 name*. So I phoned the deputy head because she had put on some training on
233 attachment for the parents of adoptive kids like a month before and I knew they
234 were rolling out that training for the teaching staff but I thought I'm going to have to
235 phone and tell her that. . . You know when you can hear from someone's voice 'Oh
236 Fuck' [laughter]. She didn't say that, but you know when you hear an intake of
237 breath, and she was brilliant to be fair. And she was going like, 'thank you for telling
238 me, that shouldn't be happening, we wouldn't tell a parent we think your child is
239 autistic.' . . . I said it's fine for me and *husband* because we are sound enough in
240 our clinical opinions, and know enough about it to know that's not the case, but for
241 another adoptive parent that could send them over the edge. You just don't say
242 that to an adoptive parent because that's the fear isn't it, you know you just don't
243 do that.

244 . . . She hadn't been on it [training] yet, but she was just trying to give us a
245 reason and almost like make it our problem not hers . . . *son* didn't meet
246 expectations and *husband* said, so what are you going to do about it and she said
247 'nothing' [laughter]. I thought I was going to have to physically restrain *husband*
248 from lynching her over the table. . . So she was just crap she was just so awful. . .
249 Then there was an incident when they had started giving them homework which I
250 disagree with anyway. . . If they only have to write a sentence, and draw a picture,
251 my attitude was do you want to do it? *Daughter* would invariably say yes and
252 *son* would say no and that's fine and we left it at that. And *son* really unusually

253 had done it and it was in his bag. . . He's also worked out that with reading books, if I
254 don't put my reading book in the thing then I don't have to change it and if I don't
255 change it now you won't make me read it at home, so he'd worked all that out. So
256 equally the homework book hadn't gone in, so I had said to the TA who was also
257 crap, that *son's* homework book is in his book bag. So will you please, you know
258 he has done it, 'oh well if I have time', I said, 'well if you could make time' and it's
259 really hard isn't it, drop off, because all the parents are around and it was bedlum.
260 'If you could make time that would be really helpful.' I'm going to kill this woman.
261 So I said, '*teacher* is aware of the issues with homework for *son* so please can
262 you make time'. Because I'd already spoken to *teacher* and told her I'm not
263 having an argument with *son* about homework. If you want him to do it, you
264 make that the motivator from school. I'm not arguing with him about it and then she
265 said, 'you know what I'll do is I'll show him some other children's books, so he can
266 see what other children are doing' and I just went 'No! don't do that.' and left the
267 building. . . I got on the phone to *husband* and I was so mad, I was in tears and I
268 was just livid, just livid because it was like the final straw of like loads of things. And
269 I was like you need to speak to school, you're a teacher, you sort it and speak to
270 school. And so we saw the deputy head *name* who was new and really on it and
271 she had him in that Friday afternoon and talked it through and she agreed that she
272 would do some stuff with *son*. Not on a 1:1 but with like a few of his friends. . . My
273 dad had picked up on the fact that he wouldn't read for my dad because 'I don't
274 want to get it wrong' so it was almost like a fear of failure, low self-esteem around
275 reading all of those things. So she was brilliant with him. She just did a few sessions
276 with him, and they were just brilliant. So she took him off with his friends because
277 *school name* has got an amazing outdoor . . . space. She took him in the woods,
278 and they did a word search and they made sentences out of the words. All about
279 this monster called Cheeky and they all got a certificate. And she was also using
280 *son* as a bit of a guineapig because it think she knows there were problems in that
281 class and she was kind of demonstrating what you could be doing. And it benefited
282 *son* hugely, but I'm not naïve it was proving a point [laughter] to the teaching
283 staff as well. But that's fine because for the first time he came out of class buzzing
284 which was just lovely and then she did another session with him and some friends

285 where they had to go on a treasure hunt because the monster had stolen a bear and
286 they had to read sentences and go round school. It was exciting, there was a reward
287 after it and there was loads of praise, she let him take his bow and arrow in to shoot
288 the words in the woods. . . It was very child centred not sit down and read it.
289 Whereas we'd had a thing with *teacher* where he came home and he said 'I wrote
290 sentences' and I said 'Oh that's amazing *teacher* must have been so proud.' 'No
291 because I didn't leave finger spaces.' Oh for fucks sake. And I went in and said
292 'basic child development that you need to give praise and I'm sure by the end of
293 year 2 he'll be doing finger spaces' and I just lost it. And she [deputy head] was like,
294 take the pressure off. . . Over May half term. . . Cheeky the Monster set him two
295 challenges. One of which he chose to do which was go on a treasure hunt and he
296 actually wrote it. And he was just given stuff in a way that he has never been
297 motivated before and when we got home from camping Cheeky the monster had
298 written him a letter that was here and she had written it to him and *daughter*. So
299 she just, it made such a difference, such a difference. So that was . . . really positive
300 and now he's got a really, really, good teacher. You know he's been star of the week
301 already. And I know more about *current teacher* than I ever knew about
302 *previous teacher* which to me says it all. Oh *current teacher* likes chips and her
303 favourite flavour of crisps is cheese and onion but you know I couldn't tell you any of
304 that about *previous teacher*. I tried to keep a really open mind about his teacher
305 last year because various people had said she's rubbish but you know new child,
306 new year. . . You know she is rubbish and I'm not alone in that. . . I think she's just
307 crap [laughter] I genuinely do. . . I know other parents who's kids aren't adopted and
308 it was actually the head of Ed Psych in *local authority*, I was in a meeting and she's
309 a governor and . . . I didn't realise her kids were at *name of school*. And I said 'oh
310 congratulations on becoming a governor' and she said 'how do you know?' I said 'oh
311 my kids are at *name of school*, I've got twins in reception one with *teacher
312 name* and *teacher name*. She said '*teacher name* the desert year', 'Ohhh'
313 [laughter]. But we're past that now and he's got a really good teacher.

314 Whereas it's been quite funny with *daughter* because she's found settling
315 into year 1 much harder because she's also got a really good teacher but she loved
316 her teacher so much last year and so she's just not *previous teacher*. Whereas

317 *teacher* who she's got is a really lovely teacher. You know I've heard loads of
318 really good things about her but . . . *daughter* is much more of a home bird in a
319 way. So if we go camping, we like camping, *son* will be like a pig in pig muck,
320 outside, filthy, loving it. *Daughter* would probably rather play with little figures in
321 the tent, mostly, but she'd really rather be at home and I don't even think is that
322 about adoption . . . I think that's just her. So until she knows what's expected of her
323 and what the routine is . . . she's been quite tearful in the morning you know at drop
324 off and in school I think she is finding it harder. She just doesn't quite know what's
325 expected of her, whereas last year wasn't such an issue because she used to love
326 *previous teacher*. The teacher is really key. I think for *current teacher* . . . she
327 will love her, she's lovely but at the moment though she's still sort of grieving
328 *previous teacher*. Like we had to go and hug her on the way out the other day. . .
329 It's that transition from one to another for her and that's just her. I don't think its
330 trauma, I don't think its adoption, I just think it's just . . . *daughter* is much slower
331 to warm up with people generally. She just spends longer sussing people out,
332 whereas *son* is much more out there. I think it's just different personalities, yeah
333 they are really quite different personalities. I think for her it's just getting used to
334 knowing what the rules are knowing what is expected and then she will be fine.
335 She's sort of nervous when she doesn't know that. For all children its helpful
336 [laughter] yeah, we're only on week one of this term really aren't we?

337 . . . I could tell you who *daughters* little group of friends are but I couldn't
338 tell you who *son's* are because I think he just plays with whoever and I don't think
339 he plays on his own. Every report we get through is like he's really sociable, he plays
340 with other kids but they literally just do oh I'm kicking a football, oh your kicking a
341 football, lets kick that ball together, whereas girls are much more clique even at 5. . .
342 I know there was an issue last year with *daughter* being called a witch. But again
343 it was funny because it was one little boy, we just happened to be walking out of
344 school with him and his mum and out of nowhere he said, 'everybody is calling
345 *daughter* a witch' and his mother and I said, 'that's not very kind.' So I called
346 *Headteacher* and she said, 'I know where that has come from.' *daughter* had
347 written, as she does on everything *name and first initial of surname* on
348 something, and three kids had, and school hadn't told me about it, which is fine

349 because I expect school to manage stuff like that, so they had written 'is a witch'
350 underneath. And they'd promised that *daughter* didn't know about it and they'd
351 had to clean it off and her words were, 'the girl was devastated' and let's just say the
352 two boys knew they were in trouble [laughter] and I just thought, well its obviously
353 not stopped because they're still doing it. So she phoned me back and she goes,
354 'Don't tell anyone but we didn't do maths today, we did circle time about how we
355 talk to our friends.' And I just thought perfect, you know dealt with, sorted because
356 given the bit that worried me was 'I didn't want to tell *teacher* because I didn't
357 want to get people into trouble.' She did a thing on how it's important to tell the
358 teachers or the TAs and actually helping your friends. . . That seems to be resolved
359 but I suppose that's still in the back of my mind, is she worried in school because . . .
360 there are some very strong characters in her class and *daughter*. . . she's not quiet
361 at home but she's quite quiet in class and whether she's not feeling quite
362 comfortable yet, I don't know. . . I'm just not sure and I just worry more with girls
363 with the 'Oh I don't like that' or 'you like that' or 'I don't. . .', or 'you've got the
364 wrong headband on.' There's all of that boys don't do. So I'm keeping my eye on it
365 but also *daughter*, she's sort of quite good at standing up for herself. I think
366 people often think that *son* is the dominant one because he is louder but actually
367 *daughter* if she doesn't want to do it she won't do it. If she's doing it with *son*
368 it's because she wants to do it. If she doesn't want to do it [laughter] you could do
369 all the persuading in the world and she won't do it [laughter]. It's not as unequal as
370 it often looks. He might be shouting all the instructions but she's only following
371 them because she wants to [laughter].

372 So I think with school . . . I think there's another little girl who is adopted in
373 *sons* class and . . . through the school I don't know what the numbers are because
374 I'm not privy to that information but there are quite a few, and that I think helps. . .
375 When you are in reception they obviously do, bring baby photos, they're very much
376 bring photos of you as a baby or a toddler. I just thought was really good because
377 they've made that adjustment and stuff which I thought was really positive. And I
378 mean I don't know what they do further up the school but I thought that in itself I
379 thought was really positive and really nice. We're lucky because their foster carer
380 gave us loads of photos on a CD so we have got them . . . but I don't know what

381 *friend's name* circumstances are. So, it's nice that they already said that to
382 people. So you don't have to go 'I don't have any photos of them as a baby' so I
383 thought that was good. . . I think that's really good that they put on attachment
384 training for the teachers. It's really positive. They did another thing last year with
385 *name of another school* because they've also got a lot of adoptive parents there,
386 on life story work, a little workshop. . . I think maybe there were . . . three things last
387 year. So you know that's really positive.

388 No I don't feel that there is anything that they've needed to do specifically
389 for them, I think *husband's* frustration for example is that . . . he's more target
390 driven than I am because that's his bread and butter that's what he knows about.
391 He's in primary education, of course he knows about all these targets. And he goes,
392 'well what are they going to use the pupil premium on then to support *son* if he
393 needs it?' . . . I think that is the frustration, that there won't be much pupil premium
394 at *school name* because there aren't many kids who would be eligible for it
395 because it's a very white middle class school really. It's kind of like well if he needs it
396 I'm not sure how we would get hold of it . . . because it's swallowed up in a bigger
397 pot. . . So I fail to see how its benefitting my kid. And that's fine at the moment
398 because I'm not sure they need it and I'm kind of waiting to see how *son* gets on
399 this year . . . because I feel with *son* it's not that he can't read it's that he won't
400 read. . . I don't think there a specific thing, he's too little to tell anyway. . . It's
401 almost his self-esteem and all of those things. 'I don't want to get it wrong, I don't
402 want to do it'. He's also bloody bored of those rubbish books [laughter]. . . He's
403 used to me reading to him in quite an interesting way with voices. . . he loves being
404 read to more so than *daughter*. . . He will sit you know, I read myself to sleep let
405 alone him [laughter]. . . He'll be read to all day and he retains the information so . . .
406 he'll read the story back in terms of repeating it because I think he's just bored of
407 having 'yum, yum, I will get you'. 'It's the Billy Goats Gruff' and he know it's not the
408 Billy Goats Gruff because that's not the Three Billy Goats Gruff, he knows they don't
409 just say 'yum, yum, I will get you, trip trap trip trap run away', whatever it was, 'run
410 along.' . . . It was funny because, he was like 'aww I've got to read my reading book
411 because I promised *teacher* and you must keep a promise.' And he's actually read
412 it, which is shocking behaviour but he's read his reading book. I kind of feel that with

413 the right teacher this year he will probably just catch up and zoom along but if he
414 doesn't for any reason then I think it is going to be an interesting battle how we get
415 the support he needs.

416 It's a really tricky one because *husband* [is] deputy head in *another
417 locality* and the school he's at has links to the school the twins are at. Fairly distant
418 and they're . . . in separate teaching alliances, so they're not that linked. But he still
419 meets with the Head and his assistant head has just gone to *name of school* for a
420 secondment to cover maternity leave so there are kind of links there. So it would
421 probably be easier for us to push the buttons than it maybe would for other parents
422 rightly or wrongly. . . It really shouldn't be about that but I think it's hard isn't it cos
423 like education is *husbands* bag, he was very much the driver in them going to that
424 school and I felt I suppose I didn't have a leg to stand on but equally if there was a
425 health issue he would completely bow to me. . . Because that's my bag and I know
426 about that and I would make every decision on that.

427 . . . Ofsted says it's outstanding, I don't think it's outstanding I think it coasts.
428 I think *husband's* school is outstanding because they get results that are only
429 marginally worse than *school name* but that's in *another locality* as opposed to
430 *local area*[laughter] but I think would I want my kids at *husband's* school? 'No'
431 because I don't think they should be at the same school as their dad. But equally,
432 you know, they're all really nice kids there and they're . . . making good friends there
433 . . . and they go to people's houses and . . . people come here . . . so that's all
434 positive.

435 . . . They really do fight my two, they really, really, fight and you know we had
436 looked after, one of *daughter's* friends from school because her mum was
437 desperate. And my two had a full on fight, and you see this kid go [laughter] because
438 you know *friend's name* is *daughter's* age and she's got a little sister. I think it's
439 harder when they're the same age because you can't say don't beat up your little
440 brother he's only little don't do that, cos they're not. It is a challenge, 'i've asked
441 you to stop fighting and I've told you you're going to get hurt and if you now hurt
442 each other, don't moan to me about it, because I've asked you to stop, you've
443 chosen not to stop both of you.' I was speaking to my sister whose kids aren't
444 adopted and it sounds really weird, she goes 'I'm in the toilet because the girls are

445 fighting and it's making no difference if I'm there or not' [laughter], fair enough
446 [laughter].

447 In terms of school I think we're lucky, in that I don't think they've needed . . .
448 allowances if you like . . . they really haven't. . . They go into school no worse or no
449 better than other kids that aren't adopted who are wailing and nashing teeth far
450 more than my two are. . . they're a bit clingy sometimes, you know I'm sure when
451 the childminder takes them they don't do any of that.

452 . . . I think she [Nursery teacher] just got kids I don't think it was just *son* . .
453 . I think she's incredibly skilled and you know she just also got parents and I think
454 that was the difference. You know she was willing to listen to me and my concerns.
455 She got what the things he liked and the things he didn't like. . . You're meant to
456 encourage them to sit and write their name every morning and you know we never
457 did that [laughter] that was never going to happen in a million years, you know and
458 she got that, but she equally got that he'll stand up and tell you a story. . . One of
459 *son's* strengths . . . is he will just get on and play . . . and that he's willing, but he's
460 not so fixed in his idea that he won't develop it. So he'll play and if someone else
461 says ' . . .and we do this' and he'll be like 'oh yeah, you know let's make it like. . .' So
462 he's not, 'no I'm building a castle like this', 'yeah, yeah, no we can make it a pirate
463 ship.' And he'd be happy to build that and take that on. And she just sort of got that
464 about him. But I think she also, I think she got parents as well and that was the
465 difference with *daughter's* teacher. She got kids but she also got parents. . . To go
466 back to last year, until we complained, *daughter's* teacher was always on the door
467 in the morning, *teacher's name* [son's teacher] was in the class and the TA was on
468 the door. So that was one of the things that when we met with the deputy head, as
469 a mother of twins it is more obvious to me than any other parent in school. That
470 difference between these two classes, I'm not even experiencing it a year of two
471 later, I'm experiencing it every day you know. And I said *teacher's name* is always
472 there and you can tell her 'you know she had a bad night's sleep'. That's all you
473 need to say sometimes, 'you know she had a nightmare last night and she may be a
474 bit sleepy', that's all you need to say sometimes. She hid in the classroom because
475 she didn't want to talk to us. . . I mean for god sake this is reception, this is not year
476 6, its reception you need to be there because actually as a reception teacher in my

477 view you have to manage the parents as much as you have to manage the kids. . .
478 You might not like talking to parents, you might absolutely rather be in your
479 classroom. I get that, I completely get that. I think the kids quite liked her I don't
480 think they didn't like *teacher's name*. I don't think she will be on *son's* list of
481 favourite teachers but he didn't dislike her. But you can't hide in your class you've
482 got to be there, it's not good enough unless it's the school policy that it's the TAs but
483 you can't have the teacher in one class and the TA in another. You just can't. Not
484 every day. Not unless it's your PPA you can't. It just used to make me feel really
485 cross and a bit sad for *son* really and I wasn't alone in that. That was one of the
486 things we raised, and after that she was on the door. She must have bloody hated
487 me [laughter] she must have never been so glad to see the back of somebody
488 [laughter]. But you know to be fair to her, we met with *name*, the deputy, and
489 two weeks later we met with her and *daughter's* teacher and the deputy
490 altogether and that must have been a hard meeting for her to be fair because she
491 knew we'd complained. . . but you know it was fine actually. . . Because I'm used to
492 being in difficult meetings at work, I kind of go into work mode. So I go with my list,
493 and I go with this and I go with that and I might be really emotional afterwards but
494 in it . . . I stop being a mum and I start being a professional. I think it massively helps
495 and I think, I really feel for parents that have no experience of that, I really do. And
496 it's funny talking to a colleague at work who adopted at the same time; if we can't
497 navigate this bloody system, and we're in a system. We're in the NHS, we're used to
498 systems, we work jointly with social services and we can't navigate it and get what
499 we want, how the hell does someone that works at Tesco, no disrespect to anyone
500 who works at Tesco, but how does somebody who works at Tesco do that because
501 that's so out of your sphere. I mean don't get me wrong, people do get it and they
502 get good at it very fast. . . You know I work now with adults, who are now really
503 difficult parents. One of the things I've learnt, we made those parents because we
504 made their life so difficult they had to fight for every single bloody thing, all the way
505 through childhood. So guess what through adulthood they're still fighting because
506 that's what you do when you need to fight for your children you do fight for them . .
507 . you'll do anything. And actually you often end up being better informed than the
508 professionals because it's motivating to you . . . in terms of your fight for your child,

509 to read background stuff and to read this, and that says that so deal with it. . . Don't
510 get me wrong, we've fought in terms of we've gone in and complained but we
511 haven't had to fight in terms of, I know some people have had to fight. You know if
512 *son* behaves in school in the way he behaves at home we'd be having massive
513 issues in school, but he doesn't he's a model child in school luckily, because I would
514 rather he behave like that at home than in school. . . You know he would have been
515 excluded, because I think the tolerance in nice middle class schools for tricky
516 behaviour is low. He probably would end up at *husband's school* because they
517 don't exclude no matter what the kids do [laughter]. We haven't had to fight, but if
518 we did we would, bloody hell and we'd get good at it, and also you've got the
519 resources to if we need it we'll get a solicitor. . . We're fortunate to be able to do
520 that or if they did go to another school we've got a car and we can drive them
521 further and we can do all of those things. And actually other parents don't have
522 those options and resources and I think it's really, really hard.

523 I mean I think it is really positive . . . we are one group of parents in the
524 country that honestly has choice about where their child goes to school, we really
525 are. Because I remember feeling quite guilty in the playground . . . cos they can go to
526 nursery but they're not guaranteed a place in reception and 'I don't know if they'll
527 get in, oh god', 'er sorry mine are taking up two places' [laughter] you know it's sort
528 of 'sorry, yeah, we probably do live just outside catchment.' So kids get in whose
529 siblings are there from here, but most kids who live here wouldn't without a reason
530 get in. So the kids over the road go because they used to live nearer . . . and then
531 the siblings got in. . . It's, 'not really worried' [laughter], so you know I think, you
532 almost feel a bit guilty. Very nice position to be in, but in that playground . . . gossip
533 you feel like, 'yeah well sorry' [laughter] especially when there's two of them. Two
534 places gone [laughter]. But I think that government initiative is really good. . . I think
535 we're really lucky again in a way they would be fine anywhere, but if they weren't I
536 think being able to choose that is very important and who knows when they get to
537 secondary school, that will become more important to have that choice.

538 I think they need to know about attachment, I think all schools should know
539 about that. . . I know Timpson's are doing a big campaign . . . they should know
540 about that, I think it's really important. . . I don't think it's just about adopted kids, I

541 think it's about so many kids that I just think it's about making it as normal as you
542 know about autism. . . Changing the ethos of the school accordingly. And
543 understanding why kids maybe find transition difficult . . . and I think that ongoing
544 impact of trauma. And again, I feel really privileged, and lucky, and so blessed that
545 our kids didn't have that. Other than the trauma of their world being turned upside
546 down at eight months, they hadn't been neglected, they weren't sexually abused,
547 they didn't have fag butts stubbed out on them. Obviously there would have been
548 in-utero stuff . . . where they would have had cortisol levels going through the roof. .
549 . They didn't see it . . . they didn't experience it as toddlers or young children or any
550 of those things.

551 There was a talk I went to on early trauma and. . .understanding, that
552 actually had that child got ADHD or is it actually the impact of early trauma? So
553 you're actually trying to give people labels all the time. . . The British psychological
554 [Society] . . . they've done a whole new way of looking at it. So instead of giving
555 diagnoses you should be looking at the people's histories and experiences. . . I
556 always remember a woman as a student she had a diagnosis of schizophrenia, and
557 one day she was telling me what had happened to her in her life and your like
558 'bloody hell, I'm amazed you're here let alone having a diagnosis'. So is it
559 schizophrenia or is it absolutely a reaction to a really, really shit life? I think just
560 because you suffer early life trauma doesn't mean you're going to go on and have a
561 really shit life at all. You know people are resilient and people move on from that,
562 and I think . . . schools understanding that would really help. I think it would make a
563 massive difference.

564 . . . There was a great quote from an American psychologist saying all a kid
565 really needs is someone to think they're the best thing ever. And there is something
566 about that and I think that's why you warm to certain teachers because you get the
567 feeling that they think your kid is brilliant. And . . . *daughter's* teacher made
568 every parent feel like their child was brilliant. And I'm sure she had kids who she
569 preferred in that class, cos in a class of thirty you're going to get kids who you really
570 like and kids you think for god's sake. And that's normal, I'm not naïve, I'm not
571 expecting every teacher to think my kid is the best thing ever, but I expect you to

572 give me the impression that my child is the best thing ever [laughter] . . . and I don't
573 care that you think he's a little shit.

574 . . . I think it's that child-centredness and I do think it's really hard in the
575 education system at the moment. . . I suppose I fundamentally disagree with . . . the
576 government curriculum. . . I strongly disagree with it. But equally could I home
577 educate my children? No [laughter] we'd be all up for murder [laughter] either them
578 for me or me for them, No. it just can't happen. Do I want my kids in a private
579 school? No, so unless . . . you're going to take your kids out of that system you have
580 to go, 'this is the system'. The fact that they're learning joined up writing I think is
581 absolutely frigging ridiculous. . . I just think it is absolutely ridiculous. So that's not
582 the teachers fault, that's the pressure from above and unless teachers as a body
583 revolt against that, that's part of the problem. I'm getting on my political soap box,
584 but that's part of the problem with education being political. It's like the NHS being
585 political, every minister wants to make their mark on it. So we're suffering still from
586 Gove, aren't we for education so . . . I just think it's ridiculous that they're not all just
587 running around outside being children. . . I suppose that was part of the reason for
588 choosing *name of school*. Is that it has this amazing outside . . . and for a city
589 school, it doesn't feel like a city school because it's on the edge of the *name* flood
590 plain. It just doesn't feel like a city school. Whereas . . . the nearest school to us is
591 *name of school* and is a very, very, city school. . . It's a big school in *local area*,
592 it's a massive old Victorian three story building. . . It feels like a city school with a
593 fenced in playground, but *Name of school* doesn't feel like that and that's what I
594 like about it. They could use it more productively which is what I think the deputy
595 head was trying to show them [laughter]. They do go there once a week and play in
596 the woods and that's good. I think we're lucky in that they go there and we're lucky
597 that we don't need to fight for their education.

598 I think we've just always been open and honest about it anyway. if I'm stood
599 at the bus stop I don't tell people they're adopted but all their friends' parents know
600 they're adopted. . . I'm not pretending that they're biologically mine at all. . . You
601 know when people go 'oh they look really like you', I go, 'that's lovely you say that
602 but they're adopted'. . . It's about if they're ever talking about *birth mum's*
603 tummy, that they're not going WHAT! And when they're playing . . . if it comes up in

604 play, that they know, or if they talk about *names*, if they're telling bits of their life
605 history. I remember one trainer telling us . . . your children always need to know
606 their full history from you by the time they're 11 because after that, that's when
607 they start to look outside. But also giving them a version that they're happy to tell . .
608 . we don't need to tell everybody everything but we need to tell. . . I think one mum
609 was saying that her daughter was on a school trip and just disclosed far, far, too
610 much to the mother that she was sat next to on the bus. But I kind of want them to
611 be proud that we chose them and they're special, and that's really special. . . I want
612 them to know . . . they are my family, they are absolutely my family, and their
613 cousins are their cousins and they're not their adoptive cousins and their
614 grandparents are their grandparents. But they do have a whole birth family and we
615 always refer to ourselves as the family and birth family as birth family. We normally
616 refer to *birth mum's name* as *birth Mum's name* we don't normally say tummy
617 mummy or anything like that. Just you were in *birth mum's name* tummy and
618 that how we, and that's probably me more than them, but if they said was she our,
619 I'd say yes she's your biological mother. . . *daughter* she wanted the whole how
620 are babies made so we did the whole how are babies made with me and her in the
621 car, it was hilarious. It was just like very basic but she was like that's disgusting
622 [laughter] and like driving along like five minutes later and she was going that's
623 disgusting [laughter]. So she's never asked since but it was really funny. Only adults
624 do it, oh my god she's going to be saying to *son* you put your willy in here. Oh god
625 [laughter]. You know they're very aware, because they have baths together, they're
626 very aware of their own anatomy and boys and girls anatomy because they've seen
627 each other. Like oh god[laughter] only adults, only adults [laughter] [indecipherable
628 2 seconds] but yeah I just thought it was important that school knew. We were
629 talking to *headteacher* about *son's* aggression at home and we sort of said
630 about the domestic violence history but we did say to her that is not for the school
631 to know. I don't think they [children] need to know, but I think they [school] need to
632 know but that's just my view, in the same way I think it's important that the kids
633 know they are adopted because there is nothing to hide.

634 I do letter box, I don't know what it's like in your house but I've always done
635 handprints and get them to draw a picture and I've now started asking them if they

636 want to say anything. So last year was hilarious, *son* said, 'it's ok that you can't
637 look after us', which was a bit like whoof, and *daughter* said, 'I saw father
638 Christmas on TV.' Which I thought summed up four year olds [laughter] from the
639 really profound to the really inane [laughter]. This year *daughter* wanted to put
640 on her picture she was six and I was like *birth Mum* will know you're five, and she
641 was like, 'oh it's a joke' [laughter]. It's like the father Christmas bit but you know I
642 try and include them in that little way of doing it but, if they don't want to I'm not
643 going to force them to do it . . . I just think it's important. It's not because I want
644 allowances to be made for them but it's just that's their history in the same way if. . .
645 I was French I would expect them to know I was French . . . or you know if one of
646 their friends mum has really serious mental health issues. . . Well I would expect
647 them to know that. . . It's not about making allowances for them or anything like
648 that it's just their history and part of who they are. Much as I'd love to say they are
649 genetically mine, they're not, they are who they are. You know I think everybody is
650 different about how open and honest they want to be and how much they feel they
651 can be. . . I think as well because they're not the only kids in the school, it sort of
652 made it easier to do that as well . . . if they were the only adopted kids in the school,
653 it would maybe make them stand out where as they're really not. . . Also you know
654 don't get me wrong, I don't go out telling everybody but you know parents talk to
655 each other as well. I'm not bothered, it doesn't bother me, this is just how we have
656 our family.

657 . . . At this age, kids don't judge and I suppose I wonder when they're older
658 whether kids will judge but then it amazes me these days what kids do and don't
659 judge on. You know like *high school name* is where they will probably go to
660 secondary school, you know have gender-neutral toilets. Which would have been a
661 massive issue in my school career. . . Whereas kids really don't give a shit about that
662 anymore, they really don't. . . I think I worry more about the whole social media
663 and the ability to find birth parents and birth siblings and all of those things. I worry
664 about that, I think, more than education. I suppose you worry more about the
665 impact of peers and I mean at the end of the day they'll do how they do in
666 education. Do I worry about them getting older, well of course I do, you lose control
667 and that will change things but at least there's that safety net of well they won't be

668 going to *name of high school*. At the moment, the school I would like them to go
669 to will most likely change in the next 5 years, but then at that point, another good
670 school will have popped out and they can go there . . . and that is really reassuring. I
671 can try and influence in that way I suppose to a degree, which is quite nice place to
672 be. I mean I worry about education and the stresses it puts on kids but not in terms
673 of adoption. What will be, will be, wont it.

Stage 5: Abbreviated Transcript Coded

Jane

I took adoption leave for a year, which was quite nice in a way because they came to us at 8 months.	Positive
So I took 12 months off and then they went to a local nursery	Time
. . . It was an old sure start building but it wasn't a sure start nursery.	Fully equipped Established
It was run by two women who had been sure start managers, so they were just really on it	Experienced
and they were basically . . . in it for the kids rather than to make money.	Motives
Obviously, they needed to make money but they were doing it because they loved working with kids	Loved kids
and they attracted quite a lot of steady staff and old staff.	Consistency Old staff
. . . you go to some nurseries and it's all 18 year old kids	Young staff
and there were some 18 year olds but there were a lot of older women who'd been in it for a long time	Experience
. . . Every room opened onto the outside	Outdoor provision
so they had a lot of indoor, outdoor stuff which especially for *son*, he needs. That was really nice.	Provision
and also by that point they were rising two and they were kind of ready. . .	They were ready
They settled really well there,	Positive
the main issues we had were on . . . the induction.	Specific event
We had to leave after an hour, they really weren't happy about that.	Time
Then they were sometimes clingy in the morning but not massively clingy	Need me
and we used to just manage it by having breakfast there,	Manageable
so they were so starving they didn't really want me they wanted food [laughter] they'd be like oh ok bye.	Priorities
You know what about me? [laughter]	Rejection
they do still sometimes cry. . .	Need me
He was in the school nursery for a year,	Time
so he and *daughter* were on the same carpet because they had two carpets.	Together
So they had this wonderful teacher *name* who was just brilliant who completely got him	She got him
. . . I went in because we were having loads of problems with his behaviour at home. . . although he was very good in school,	Seeking help Communication
he was acting out at home this sort of anger and frustration.	Anger Frustration
So when he was in nursery, *teacher* did a carpet time about kind hands and disco fingers.	Meaningful intervention
. . . And they did friend of the week and *daughter*	Meaningful

took hers down . . . but *son's* is still up there . . . because *son* has the best disco fingers.	
And he said that's when I was being violent.	Awareness
I went in and I said to the TA, 'I've got to tell you this',	Communication
and she said 'I've never used the word violent' and I said, 'I'm sure you didn't but he knows'.	Sharing information
. . . I think she [Nursery teacher] just got kids I don't think it was just *son*	She got kids
. . . I think she's incredibly skilled	Experience
and you know she just also got parents and I think that was the difference.	She got parents
You know she was willing to listen to me and my concerns.	She listened
She got what the things he liked and the things he didn't like	Knows him
. . . You're meant to encourage them to sit and write their name every morning and you know we never did that [laughter]	Expectations
that was never going to happen in a million years, you know and she got that, but she equally got that he'll stand up and tell you a story	Realistic Expectations Understanding Recognising strengths
. . . One of *son's* strengths . . . is he will just get on and play . . . and that he's willing,	
but he's not so fixed in his idea that he won't develop it.	
So he'll play and if someone else says '. . .and we do this' and he'll be like 'oh yeah, you know let's make it like. . .'	
So he's not, 'no I'm building a castle like this', 'yeah, yeah, no we can make it a pirate ship.' And he'd be happy to build that and take that on.	
And she just sort of got that about him.	She got him
But I think she also . . . got parents as well and that was the difference with *daughter's* teacher.	She got parents Different
She got kids but she also got parents	She got kids She got parents

. . . The nursery teacher was amazing and the reception teacher was rubbish.	
daughter had an amazing reception teacher and *son* had a rubbish one.	Differences
I wish it had been the other way round because *daughter* is more motivated to do reading, writing all of those things.	Intrinsic motivation
She would have done them wherever she was.	Individual traits
So she has completely flown with *teacher* and is reading fluently	Academic progress
. . . she's on target,	Meeting expectations
she's reading really well,	School expectations Measure of success

she's motivated by it.	Intrinsic Motivation
She spends her whole life writing notes, that's just what she loves to do	Interested
. . . If she likes it and she's motivated by it and she wants to do it, she'd have done that with whoever.	Interested
Whereas *son* doesn't like doing that.	No interest
Basically they split them in reception because it is the school policy to split twins.	Separated
They don't have a policy, I've yet to see a written policy [laughter]	No evidence
and I think in retrospect I wish I had challenged it more because *son* in particular, found it really hard.	Regret
I think *daughter* quite liked it.	Positive experience
Going forward I don't think it is necessarily a bad thing.	Hopeful
In retrospect, I think I would have pushed for more support for *son*.	Now I know
. . . They claim it's policy but you know I'd love to see the policy.	No evidence
But it was really difficult with *Son* to know whether it was that or whether it's just the teacher.	Don't know
So a good example of the crapness is parents evening, trying to explain to her the problems we are having with him at home. 'Oh I don't see any of that in school'	No understanding Communication
. . . That's great they don't see it in school but it is an issue at home.	Feeling dismissed
'Do you think he could have an attachment disorder?' [laughter] I just said, 'No I don't think he has got an attachment disorder.' and I phoned the deputy.	Blame Feeling dismissed No understanding
You see the irony being that the school have quite a lot of adoptive kids there *school name* in *area name*.	They should know
So I phoned the deputy head because she had put on some training on attachment for the parents of adoptive kids like a month before	Seeking support Seeking validation Seeking understanding
and I knew they were rolling out that training for the teaching staff but I thought I'm going to have to phone and tell her that. . .	I have to say something
You know when you can hear from someone's voice 'Oh Fuck' [laughter].	Validation
She didn't say that, but you know when you hear an intake of breath,	Justification
and she was brilliant to be fair.	Positive
And she was going like, 'thank you for telling me, that shouldn't be happening, we wouldn't tell a parent we think your child is autistic.'	Feeling validated Feeling supported
. . . I said it's fine for me and *husband* because we are sound enough in our clinical opinions, and know enough about it to know that's not the case,	We're ok We know Experience
but for another adoptive parent that could send them over the edge.	Identifying with others
You just don't say that to an adoptive parent because that's the fear isn't it, you know you just don't do that.	Fear Empathy

. . . She hadn't been on it [training] yet,	No training
but she was just trying to give us a reason and almost like make it our problem not hers. . .	Blame
son didn't meet expectations	Expectations
and *husband* said, so what are you going to do about it and she said 'nothing' [laughter].	Responsibility
I thought I was going to have to physically restrain *husband* from lynching her over the table	Anger Frustration
. . . So she was just crap she was just so awful	Negativity towards teacher
. . . Then there was an incident when they had started giving them homework which I disagree with anyway	Expectation
. . . If they only have to write a sentence, and draw a picture, my attitude was do you want to do it?	Expectation
Daughter would invariably say yes and *son* would say no and that's fine and we left it at that.	Individual characteristics
And *son* really unusually had done it and it was in his bag. . .	Out of character
He's also worked out that with reading books, if I don't put my reading book in the thing then I don't have to change it and if I don't change it now you won't make me read it at home,	awareness
so he'd worked all that out.	
So equally the homework book hadn't gone in,	
so I had said to the TA who was also crap, that *son's* homework book is in his book bag.	Negativity towards teaching assistant Communication
So will you please, you know he has done it, 'oh well if I have time'. . .	Feeling dismissed Time Priorities
and it's really hard isn't it, drop off, because all the parents are around and it was bedlum.	Feeling judged Feeling self-conscious
'If you could make time that would be really helpful.'	Trying to be heard This is important Lack of recognition
I'm going to kill this woman.	Anger frustration
So I said, '*teacher* is aware of the issues with homework for *son* so please can you make time'.	They know I've told them
. . . I'd already spoken to *teacher* and told her I'm not having an argument with *son* about homework.	Conflict Expectations priorities
If you want him to do it, you make that the motivator from school.	Responsibility Expectations
I'm not arguing with him about it	Impact priorities
and then she said, 'you know what I'll do is I'll show him some other children's books, so he can see what other children are doing'	Missing the point No understanding
and I just went 'No! don't do that.' and left the building. . .	No understanding
I got on the phone to *husband*	Seeking support

and I was so mad,	Anger
I was in tears	Emotional impact
and I was just livid because it was like the final straw of like loads of things.	Too much
And I was like you need to speak to school, you're a teacher, you sort it and speak to school.	Sharing responsibility
And so we saw the deputy head *name* who was new and really on it	Conscientious Fresh approach
and she had him in that Friday afternoon and talked it through	She listened
and she agreed that she would do some stuff with *son*.	She acted
Not on a 1:1 but with like a few of his friends. . .	Not different
My dad had picked up on the fact that he wouldn't read for my dad because 'I don't want to get it wrong'	Fear of failure
so it was almost like a fear of failure, low self-esteem around reading all of those things.	Fear of failure
So she was brilliant with him.	Positive
She just did a few sessions with him, and they were just brilliant.	Positive
So she took him off with his friends because *school name* has got an amazing outdoor . . . space.	Outdoor provision
She took him in the woods,	Outdoor provision
and they did a word search and they made sentences out of the words.	Different approach
All about this monster called Cheeky	Motivating
and they all got a certificate.	Motivating/ recognition
And she was also using *son* as a bit of a guineapig because I think she knows there were problems in that class	Feeling validated Leading by example
and she was kind of demonstrating what you could be doing.	Potential
And it benefited *son* hugely,	Positive impact
but I'm not naïve it was proving a point [laughter] to the teaching staff as well.	Leading by example
But that's fine because for the first time he came out of class buzzing which was just lovely	Motivated Inspired
and then she did another session with him and some friends where they had to go on a treasure hunt because the monster had stolen a bear	Interest Motivating
and they had to read sentences and go round school.	Different approach
It was exciting,	Positive
there was a reward after it	Recognition
and there was loads of praise,	Recognition
she let him take his bow and arrow in to shoot the words in the woods	Interest Motivation
. . . It was very child centred	Child-centred
not sit down and read it.	Not task centred
Whereas we'd had a thing with *teacher* where he came home and he said 'I wrote sentences'	Proud of himself

and I said 'Oh that's amazing *teacher* must have been so proud.'	Recognition
'No because I didn't leave finger spaces.'	Dismissed No recognition
Oh for fucks sake.	
And I went in and said 'basic child development that you need to give praise	I told her
and I'm sure by the end of year 2 he'll be doing finger spaces' and I just lost it.	Expectations Anger
And she [deputy head] was like, take the pressure off	No pressure
. . . Over May half term. . . Cheeky the Monster set him two challenges.	Motivating
One of which he chose to do which was go on a treasure hunt and he actually wrote it.	Choice Interest Motivated
And he was just given stuff in a way that he has never been motivated before	Different approach
and when we got home from camping Cheeky the monster had written him a letter that was here	Thoughtful Conscientious
and she had written it to him and *daughter*. . . it made such a difference, such a difference.	Thoughtful Child-centred
So that was . . . really positive	Positive
and now he's got a really, really, good teacher.	Positive
You know he's been star of the week already.	Reward Recognition
And I know more about *current teacher* than I ever knew about *previous teacher* which to me says it all.	I know He talks about school
Oh *current teacher* likes chips and her favourite flavour of crisps is cheese and onion	connection
but you know I couldn't tell you any of that about *previous teacher*.	I didn't know No connection
I tried to keep a really open mind about his teacher last year because various people had said she's rubbish. . .	I tried
You know she is rubbish and I'm not alone in that. . .	Negativity towards teacher
I think she's just crap [laughter] I genuinely do	Negativity towards teacher
. . . I know other parents who's kids aren't adopted	It's not about adoption
and it was actually the head of Ed Psych in *local authority*, I was in a meeting and she's a governor. . . I didn't realise her kids were at *name of school*.	Justification
And I said 'oh congratulations on becoming a governor' and she said 'how do you know?'	
I said 'oh my kids are at *name of school*, I've got twins in reception one with *teacher name* and *teacher name*.	
She said '*teacher name* the desert year', 'Ohhh' [laughter].	Validation
But we're past that now and he's got a really good teacher.	Moved on
. . . To go back to last year, until we complained, *daughter's* teacher was always on the door in the morning,	Teacher practice

teacher's name [son's teacher] was in the class and the TA was on the door.	Teacher practice
So that was one of the things that when we met with the deputy head, as a mother of twins it is more obvious to me than any other parent in school.	I know I see it Different
That difference between these two classes,	Difference
I'm not even experiencing it a year of two later, I'm experiencing it every day you know.	Impact
And I said *teacher's name* is always there	
and you can tell her 'you know she had a bad night's sleep'.	Expectation Parental need
That's all you need to say sometimes, 'you know she had a nightmare last night and she may be a bit sleepy',	Parental need Communication
that's all you need to say sometimes.	Requirement
She hid in the classroom because she didn't want to talk to us. . .	Avoidance Priorities
I mean for god sake this is reception, this is not year 6,	Expectation
. . . you need to be there because actually as a reception teacher in my view you have to manage the parents as much as you have to manage the kids	Responsibility Managing parents Expectation Role
. . . You might not like talking to parents	understanding
you might absolutely rather be in your classroom. . . I completely get that.	Understanding
I think the kids quite liked her	liked by children but not by parents
I don't think they didn't like *teacher's name*.	
I don't think she will be on *son's* list of favourite teachers but he didn't dislike her.	
But you can't hide in your class you've got to be there, it's not good enough	Responsibility
unless it's the school policy that it's the TAs but you can't have the teacher in one class and the TA in another. You just can't. Not every day. Not unless it's your PPA you can't.	Consistency
It just used to make me feel really cross and a bit sad for *son* really	Emotional impact
and I wasn't alone in that.	Shared experience
That was one of the things we raised, and after that she was on the door.	Recognition
She must have bloody hated me [laughter]	Relationship
she must have never been so glad to see the back of somebody [laughter].	Relationship
But you know to be fair to her, we met with *name*, the deputy, and two weeks later we met with her and *daughter's* teacher and the deputy altogether	Meeting
and that must have been a hard meeting for her to be fair because she knew we'd complained	Empathy

. . . I just thought it was important that school knew.	Awareness
We were talking to *headteacher* about *son's* aggression at home	Sharing information
and we sort of said about the domestic violence history	Sharing information Early experience
but we did say to her that is not for the school to know.	Confidentiality
I don't think they [children] need to know,	Sharing what is appropriate
but I think they [school] need to know but that's just my view,	Awareness
in the same way I think it's important that the kids know they are adopted because there is nothing to hide.	Part of who they are Nothing to be ashamed of.
It's not because I want allowances to be made for them	Not an excuse
but it's just that's their history	Part of who they are
in the same way if. . . I was French I would expect them to know I was French	Significant Expectation
. . . or you know if one of their friend's mum has really serious mental health issues. . .	Significant Impact
Well I would expect them to know that. . .	Expectation
It's not about making allowances for them or anything like that	Not an excuse
it's just their history and part of who they are.	Part of who they are
Much as I'd love to say they are genetically mine, they're not,	Acceptance
they are who they are.	acceptance
You know I think everybody is different about how open and honest they want to be and how much they feel they can be. . .	Openness
I think as well because they're not the only kids in the school,	Not the only ones Not different
it sort of made it easier to do that as well . . .	
if they were the only adopted kids in the school, it would maybe make them stand out where as they're really not. . .	Not the only ones Not different
Also you know don't get me wrong, I don't go out telling everybody	It's not for everyone to know
but you know parents talk to each other as well.	
I'm not bothered, it doesn't bother me,	
this is just how we have our family.	Acceptance

. . . You know we're lucky I don't think they have got attachment issues really,	Lucky
i think, *son* certainly has emotional regulation issues,	Emotional regulation
he goes up and down faster than most kids I know	Up and down
but they haven't got attachment issues.	Attachment
It makes a massive difference. I think we were really lucky,	Lucky
they were removed at birth,	Separation
they had a really strong attachment to their foster	Connection

carers	Relationship
and of course they had a massive upheaval at 8 months when the rug was pulled from under them,	Separation
but I would say in a way that they attached to us faster than we attached to them. . .	Connection
Don't get me wrong I loved them.	Love
If someone had tried to take them away, I would have fought tooth and nail.	Belonging Protection
I guess they were more reliant on me because they were babies.	need

I don't know if it's that early experience but I do worry about the genetic background if that makes sense.	Genetics
Their birth Dad, he's a nasty piece of work.	Birth family
You know he was the reason they were removed. . . because of domestic violence.	Fault Blame
We haven't shared that. . .	Confidential/ private
I'm telling you because its anonymous and it doesn't matter	
. . . a part from my sister because she's named in our will for who they would go to so she knows,	
but we don't tell family, friends, people.	Confidential/ private
We told school because we thought it was important for school . . . to know the reason why they were removed because I feel like it is their story	It's their story On a need to know basis
and if they want to share it when they're older that's fine	Ownership
but I don't want everyone getting to know their story. . .	Ownership Confidential/ private It's their story
Up to now it's been, you know *birth Mum* couldn't keep you safe	
birth mum couldn't look after you	
but we've not said because *birth dad* beat the crap out of her	
and she kept letting him back when told not to . . . or advised not to.	
I worry certainly about *son's* violence and aggression in terms of . . . genetics with birth dad	Aggression Genetics
and his dad being in that young offenders unit and is in and out of prison now.	
Social workers don't know where he is anymore.	
I think if they went to prisons they probably would do to be fair.	
I worry about that more than their early experience. . .	Worry
I worry about that more . . . because he gets so angry about things	So angry
and he gets . . . so cross about nothing and that worries me.	About nothing Extreme

Although it's interesting that he doesn't do that at school.	Environment
So he can, to a degree control it, because the only time they've seen it is at pick up with me.	Control
He doesn't do it in class, he's a model child. . .	Model child
. . . I find it really hard to pinpoint exactly what it is, sometimes it's just about life. . .	Unsure
Because he would trot off into school happily enough so I don't think it's because he doesn't like it.	Happy in school
He's almost cross because he has been there.	Cross after school
It's like he's missing out on something here.	Connection
You know I think he finds that hard but he's just very quick to blow.	Finds it hard
We can be having a lovely time and he'll do something, and he won't be happy about it	Sudden
and he'll blow and then he'll be back down again.	Quick Sudden

. . . I could tell you who *daughters* little group of friends are	
but I couldn't tell you who *son's* are because I think he just plays with whoever	
and I don't think he plays on his own.	
Every report we get through is like he's really sociable, he plays with other kids	
but they literally just do oh I'm kicking a football, oh your kicking a football, lets kick that ball together,	
Whereas girls are much more clique even at 5. . .	
That seems to be resolved but I suppose that's still in the back of my mind,	
is she worried in school because . . . there are some very strong characters in her class	
and *daughter*. . . she's not quiet at home but she's quite quiet in class	
and whether she's not feeling quite comfortable yet,	
I don't know. . . I'm just not sure and I just worry more with girls	
with the 'Oh I don't like that' or 'you like that' or 'I don't. . .', or 'you've got the wrong headband on.'	
There's all of that boys don't do.	
So I'm keeping my eye on it	
but also *daughter*, she's sort of quite good at standing up for herself.	

I know there was an issue last year with *daughter* being called a witch.	
But again it was funny because it was one little boy, we just happened to be walking out of school with him and	

his mum	
and out of nowhere he said, 'everybody is calling *daughter* a witch'	
and his mother and I said, 'that's not very kind.'	
So I called *Headteacher* and she said, 'I know where that has come from.'	
daughter had written, as she does on everything *name and first initial of surname* on something,	
. . . and school hadn't told me about it, which is fine because I expect school to manage stuff like that,	
so they had written 'is a witch' underneath.	
And they'd promised that *daughter* didn't know about it	
and they'd had to clean it off	
and her words were, 'the girl was devastated' and let's just say the two boys knew they were in trouble [laughter]	
and I just thought, well its obviously not stopped because they're still doing it.	
So she phoned me back and she goes, 'Don't tell anyone but we didn't do maths today, we did circle time about how we talk to our friends.'	
And I just thought perfect,	
you know dealt with, sorted because given the bit that worried me was 'I didn't want to tell *teacher* because I didn't want to get people into trouble.'	
She did a thing on how it's important to tell the teachers or the TAs and actually helping your friends. . .	

. . . I think there's another little girl who is adopted in *sons* class. . .	
. . . through the school I don't know what the numbers are because I'm not privy to that information	
but there are quite a few, and that I think helps. . .	
When you are in reception they obviously do, bring baby photos,	Expectations
they're very much bring photos of you as a baby or a toddler.	Adaptations understanding
I just thought was really good because they've made that adjustment. . . which I thought was really positive.	Positive
And I mean I don't know what they do further up the school	I don't know
but I thought that in itself I thought was really positive and really nice.	Positive
We're lucky because their foster carer gave us loads of photos on a CD so we have got them. . . but I don't know what *friend's name* circumstances are.	We're ok Identifying with others
So, it's nice that they already said that to people.	Positive
So you don't have to go 'I don't have any photos of	Empathy

them as a baby'	Understanding
so I thought that was good. . .	Positive
I think that's really good that they put on attachment training for the teachers.	Training
It's really positive.	
They did another thing last year with *name of another school* because they've also got a lot of adoptive parents there	Liaising with other schools
on life story work, a little workshop. . . I think maybe there were . . . three things last year.	Training
So you know that's really positive.	Positive
No I don't feel that there is anything that they've needed to do specifically for them,	We're ok
I think *husband's* frustration for example is that . . . he's more target driven than I am because that's his bread and butter that's what he knows about.	frustration
He's in primary education, of course he knows about all these targets.	
And he goes, 'well what are they going to use the pupil premium on then to support *son* if he needs it?'	Pupil premium
. . . I think that is the frustration,	
that there won't be much pupil premium at *school name* because there aren't many kids who would be eligible for it because it's a very white middle class school really.	Funding Demographic
It's kind of like well if he needs it I'm not sure how we would get hold of it . . . because it's swallowed up in a bigger pot	I don't know
. . . So I fail to see how its benefitting my kid.	No benefit
And that's fine at the moment because I'm not sure they need it	We're ok
and I'm kind of waiting to see how *son* gets on this year	Waiting
. . . because I feel with *son* it's not that he can't read it's that he won't read	Just won't do
. . . I don't think theres a specific thing,	Nothing wrong
he's too little to tell anyway. . .	Age
It's almost his self-esteem and all of those things.	Self-esteem
'I don't want to get it wrong, I don't want to do it'.	Fear of failure
He's also bloody bored of those rubbish books [laughter]. . .	Resources
He's used to me reading to him in quite an interesting way with voices	Experience
. . . he loves being read to more so than *daughter* . . .	Positive
He will sit you know,	Positive expectations
I read myself to sleep let alone him [laughter]. . .	
He'll be read to all day and he retains the information	He is able
. . . he'll read the story back in terms of repeating it because I think he's just bored of having 'yum, yum, I will get you'.	Not inspiring Bored

'It's the Billy Goats Gruff' and he know it's not the Billy Goats Gruff because that's not the Three Billy Goats Gruff,	He knows Doesn't match his experience
he knows they don't just say 'yum, yum, I will get you, trip trap trip trap run away', whatever it was, 'run along.'	He knows
. . . It was funny because, he was like 'aww I've got to read my reading book because I promised *teacher* and you must keep a promise.'	Connection Relationship
And he's actually read it,	He's done it Out of character
which is shocking behaviour but he's read his reading book.	Success
I kind of feel that with the right teacher this year he will probably just catch up and zoom along	The right teacher
but if he doesn't for any reason then I think it is going to be an interesting battle how we get the support he needs.	The fight/ battle
. . . There was a great quote from an American psychologist saying all a kid really needs is someone to think they're the best thing ever. And there is something about that	Feeling appreciated
and I think that's why you warm to certain teachers because you get the feeling that they think your kid is brilliant.	Feeling valued
. . . *daughter's* teacher made every parent feel like their child was brilliant.	Feeling valued
And I'm sure she had kids who she preferred in that class, [because] in a class of thirty you're going to get kids who you really like and kids you think for god's sake.	Reality
And that's normal, I'm not naïve,	Normal
I'm not expecting every teacher to think my kid is the best thing ever,	Expectations
but I expect you to give me the impression that my child is the best thing ever [laughter] . . . and I don't care that you think he's a little shit.	Expectations Parental need
. . . I think it's that child-centredness	Child-centredness
and I do think it's really hard in the education system at the moment. . .	Education system
I suppose I fundamentally disagree with . . . the government curriculum. . . I strongly disagree with it.	Disagree with curriculum
But equally could I home educate my children? No [laughter]	Options
we'd be all up for murder [laughter] either them for me or me for them, No. it just can't happen.	No option
Do I want my kids in a private school? No,	No option
so unless . . . you're going to take your kids out of that system you have to go, 'this is the system'.	Acceptance
The fact that they're learning joined up writing I think is absolutely frigging ridiculous. . .	Expectations

I just think it is absolutely ridiculous.	Ridiculous
So that's not the teachers fault,	Responsibility
that's the pressure from above	Responsibility
and unless teachers as a body revolt against that, that's part of the problem.	Responsibility
I'm getting on my political soap box,	Politics
but that's part of the problem with education being political.	Politics
It's like the NHS being political,	Politics
every minister wants to make their mark on it.	Impact
So we're suffering still from Gove, aren't we for education	Impact
so . . . I just think it's ridiculous that they're not all just running around outside being children.	Expectations
. . I suppose that was part of the reason for choosing *name of school*.	Choice
Is that it has this amazing outside . . .	Outside provisions
and for a city school, it doesn't feel like a city school because it's on the edge of the *name* flood plain.	Feels different
It just doesn't feel like a city school.	Feels different
Whereas . . . the nearest school to us is *name of school* and is a very, very, city school. . .	Local provision
It's a big school in *local area*,	Local provision
it's a massive old Victorian three story building. . .	Local provision
It feels like a city school with a fenced in playground,	Local provision
but *Name of school* doesn't feel like that and that's what I like about it.	Feels different
They could use it more productively which is what I think the deputy head was trying to show them [laughter].	Not making the most of it
They do go there once a week and play in the woods and that's good.	Provision
I think we're lucky in that they go there	Lucky
and we're lucky that we don't need to fight for their education.	Lucky

I think it was funny because *husband* is a primary teacher and he's definitely coming into his own now. . .	
Whereas I work with adults now but I do a lot of work with pre-schoolers so that was more my age. . .	
You know he's not that good at sitting on the floor playing with them, whereas that's very much what I did. . .	
Have you heard of Hammon? . . . It is a sort of speech therapy programme that looks at language delay.	
The child says 'truck' and you would say 'oh yes it's a truck', 'it's a blue truck'	
and then . . . at one point *Son* went 'Mummy stop copying me' [laughter],	
being a speech therapist you know I can't help it	

[laughter]. . .	
They both talked quite early [laughter] they didn't have a choice.	
. . . but you know it was fine actually. . . Because I'm used to being in difficult meetings at work, I kind of go into work mode.	I go into work mode
So I go with my list,	I'm prepared
and I go with this and I go with that	I'm prepared
and I might be really emotional afterwards but in it . . . I stop being a mum and I start being a professional.	I'm professional
I think it massively helps . . .	Helpful
I really feel for parents that have no experience of that, I really do.	Identifying with others
And it's funny talking to a colleague at work who adopted at the same time;	Shared experience
if we can't navigate this bloody system, and we're in a system.	Systems
We're in the NHS,	We're ok
we're used to systems,	We're ok
we work jointly with social services	We know
and we can't navigate it and get what we want,	Can't get what we want
how the hell does someone that works at Tesco, no disrespect to anyone who works at Tesco, but how does somebody who works at Tesco do that because that's so out of your sphere.	Experience Socioeconomic status Position Education/ knowledge
I mean don't get me wrong, people do get it and they get good at it very fast. . .	
You know I work now with adults, who are now really difficult parents.	
One of the things I've learnt, we made those parents because we made their life so difficult	
they had to fight for every single bloody thing, all the way through childhood.	
So guess what through adulthood they're still fighting because that's what you do when you need to fight for your children	
you do fight for them . . .	The fight
you'll do anything.	You'll do anything
And actually you often end up being better informed than the professionals because it's motivating to you . . . in terms of your fight for your child,	Motivating Knowledge is power
to read background stuff and to read this, and that says that so deal with it. . .	Knowledge
Don't get me wrong, we've fought in terms of we've gone in and complained	The fight
but we haven't had to fight in terms of, I know some people have had to fight.	Identifying with others

It's a really tricky one because *husband* [is] deputy	
--	--

head in *another locality*	
and the school he's at has links to the school the twins are at.	
Fairly distant and they're . . . in separate teaching alliances,	
so they're not that linked.	
But he still meets with the Head	
and his assistant head has just gone to *name of school* for a secondment to cover maternity leave	
so there are kind of links there.	
So it would probably be easier for us to push the buttons than it maybe would for other parents rightly or wrongly. ..	Position Power
It really shouldn't be about that but I think it's hard isn't it	Unfair advantage
. . . like education is *husbands* bag, he was very much the driver in them going to that school	
and I felt I suppose I didn't have a leg to stand on	
but equally if there was a health issue he would completely bow to me. . . Because that's my bag	
and I know about that and I would make every decision on that.	
We haven't had to fight, but if we did we would, bloody hell	The fight
and we'd get good at it,	Drive ambition
and also you've got the resources to	Position Power Privilege
if we need it we'll get a solicitor. . .	Money
We're fortunate to be able to do that	Position
or if they did go to another school we've got a car	Resources
and we can drive them further	access
and we can do all of those things.	options
And actually other parents don't have those options and resources	Identifying with others No choice
and I think it's really, really hard.	It's hard

Specific support for adopted children

	In terms of school I think we're lucky,	Lucky
	in that I don't think they've needed . . . allowances if you like . . . they really haven't. . .	We're ok
	They go into school no worse or no better than other kids that aren't adopted who are wailing and nashing teeth far more than my two are. . .	No difference
	they're a bit clingy sometimes,	Need me
	you know I'm sure when the childminder takes them they don't do any of that.	Typical Normal
	You know if *son* behaves in school in the way he	Could be worse

	behaves at home we'd be having massive issues in school,	
	but he doesn't he's a model child in school luckily,	Lucky
	. . . I would rather he behave like that at home than in school. . .	
	You know he would have been excluded, because I think the tolerance in nice middle class schools for tricky behaviour is low.	Tolerance Demographic
	He probably would end up at *husband's school* because they don't exclude no matter what the kids do [laughter].	Socioeconomic position
	I mean I think it is really positive . . .	Positive
	we are one group of parents in the country that honestly has choice about where their child goes to school, we really are.	Choice
	. . . I remember feeling quite guilty in the playground . . . [because] they can go to nursery but they're not guaranteed a place in reception	Guilt Different
	and 'I don't know if they'll get in, oh god', 'er sorry mine are taking up two places' [laughter]	Guilt
	you know it's sort of 'sorry, yeah, we probably do live just outside catchment.'	Allowances
	So kids get in whose siblings are there from here,	
	but most kids who live here wouldn't without a reason get in.	
	So the kids over the road go because they used to live nearer . . . and then the siblings got in.	
	. . It's, 'not really worried' [laughter],	Guilt
	so you know I think, you almost feel a bit guilty.	Guilt
	Very nice position to be in,	Advantageous
	but in that playground . . . gossip you feel like, 'yeah well sorry' [laughter] especially when there's two of them.	Guilt
	Two places gone [laughter].	
	But I think that government initiative is really good. . .	Positive
	I think we're really lucky again in a way they would be fine anywhere,	We're ok
	but if they weren't I think being able to choose that is very important	Choice
	and who knows when they get to secondary school, that will become more important to have that choice.	Future options
	I think they need to know about attachment,	Attachment
	I think all schools should know about that. . .	Know more
	I know Timpson's are doing a big campaign . . . they should know about that,	They should know
	I think it's really important. . .	Important
	I don't think it's just about adopted kids,	Not specific to adoption
	I think it's about so many kids	More than adoption
	that I just think it's about making it as normal as you know about autism. . .	Normal

	Changing the ethos of the school accordingly.	Ethos
	And understanding why kids maybe find transition difficult . . .	Understanding
	and I think that ongoing impact of trauma.	Early experience
	And again, I feel really privileged, and lucky, and so blessed that our kids didn't have that.	We're ok Lucky
	Other than the trauma of their world being turned upside down at eight months,	Separation Loss
	they hadn't been neglected,	Extreme What could have been
	they weren't sexually abused,	Extreme What could have been
	they didn't have fag butts stubbed out on them.	Extreme What could have been
	Obviously there would have been in-utero stuff . . .	Some impact
	where they would have had cortisol levels going through the roof. . .	Stress
	They didn't see it . . .	Could have been worse
	they didn't experience it as toddlers or young children or any of those things.	Could have been worse
	There was a talk I went to on early trauma	
	and. . . understanding, that actually had that child got ADHD or is it actually the impact of early trauma?	
	So you're actually trying to give people labels all the time. . .	
	The British psychological [Society] . . . they've done a whole new way of looking at it.	
	So instead of giving diagnoses you should be looking at the people's histories and experiences. . .	
	I always remember a woman as a student she had a diagnosis of schizophrenia,	
	and one day she was telling me what had happened to her in her life	
	and your like 'bloody hell, I'm amazed you're here let alone having a diagnosis'.	
	So is it schizophrenia or is it absolutely a reaction to a really, really shit life?	
	I think just because you suffer early life trauma doesn't mean you're going to go on and have a really shit life at all.	Hope Resilience
	You know people are resilient and people move on from that,	Resilience
	and I think . . . schools understanding that would really help.	They need to know
	I think it would make a massive difference.	Impact

. . . At this age, kids don't judge	
and I suppose I wonder when they're older whether kids will	

judge	
but then it amazes me these days what kids do and don't judge on.	
You know like *high school name* is where they will probably go to secondary school,	
you know have gender-neutral toilets.	
Which would have been a massive issue in my school career. . .	
Whereas kids really don't give a shit about that anymore, they really don't. . .	
I think I worry more about the whole social media and the ability to find birth parents and birth siblings and all of those things.	
I worry about that, I think, more than education.	
I suppose you worry more about the impact of peers	
and I mean at the end of the day they'll do how they do in education.	
Do I worry about them getting older, well of course I do,	
you lose control and that will change things	
but at least there's that safety net of well they won't be going to *name of high school*.	
At the moment, the school I would like them to go to will most likely change in the next 5 years,	
but then at that point, another good school will have popped out and they can go there	
. . . and that is really reassuring.	
I can try and influence in that way I suppose to a degree,	
which is quite nice place to be.	
I mean I worry about education and the stresses it puts on kids but not in terms of adoption.	
What will be, will be, wont it.	

Interview

Stage 1: Transcription

Kevin

I = interviewer

P2 = Participant 2

I: So you said in your email

P2: Yeah

I: that you have adopted two children

P2: Yeah

I: Is that right?

P2: Yeah

I: are they birth siblings?

P2: They err, yeah they're, yeah they're half, what ever it is, they've got the same mum. Yeah and they're 6 and 8 now

I: ok so when did you adopted them?

P2: so we adopted them 5 years ago, do you want me to tell you our story?

I: Yeah that would, yeah if you're happy to

P2: Yeah. . .we adopted them 5 years ago when they were 3 and 1 err, the, they had very different lives, very different kind of backgrounds erm the older child err. . . had witnessed extreme trauma err...has got real attachment issues. The younger child was removed at 4 days old from his birth mum and was only with one set of foster carers. The older child was with lots of different foster carers with different standards of foster care if I'm honest err. . . so we've had quite a journey because erm right from the offset I think things have changed now but right from the offset we were told that they were err they were kind of didn't have any attachment issues or behavioural issues and from day one, clearly not the case and erm and so it has been, our older child, in fact he's just had an assessment actually where basically the gist of it was, he has erm very strong disorganised, very strong attachment disorder there's extensive trauma erm and in effective he's kind of frozen at two years of age erm well actually just before two years old

I: Right

P2: where he witnessed a lot of very extreme things and suffered extreme neglect. . . so we felt quite naive because it was kind of clearly things where you know we kind of took the social workers on face value erm. . . and actually it wasn't, some of the things they've said now has made us quite cross you know he wont remember, he wont remember the things that have happened to him, it's just you know massively ignorant and erm and actually, two social workers involved in the case both have been moved on really quickly afterwards. So we've been on a real journey where we were kind of working, we found it very challenging at home erm... dealing with temper tantrums, erm... very very controlling behaviour, and at first at school in reception in nursery and reception it didn't really manifest itself, there was no demand and he's a bright lad erm and very charming, gorgeous erm and then he hit year one and the jump and the deterioration was practically overnight.

I: Really?

P2: we had a phone call, I was at work, we had a phone call from school saying he, they had to escort all children out of the class, he was ripping up err he was running around on tops of tables, it was literally overnight, it was almost a catastrophic reaction in his head.

I: What do you think. . .?

P2: I think it was, it was always going to happen, I think it was demand erm he didn't have an attachment with the teacher err, I mean maybe it wasn't always going to happen but I think, it kind of, I think it erm. He's been diagnoses with oppositional defiance disorder, that phraseology err and erm he, from that point on things kind of deteriorated. He didn't have an attachment with the teacher erm she was very she wasn't particularly empathetic but also she wasn't very assertive either which for him is like having the worst combination for him actually. Erm so he them it kind of carried on for a long time, well it felt like a long time where he basically erm every you know we were communicating lots with school and school was communicating lots with us. He then switched classes to a better teacher. . . there was often the honeymoon period, what we've noticed with education is there's a honeymoon period and then it kind of disintegrates again. So he went into another class in the same cohort in the same year and erm he... and things just got worse, hitting kicking

teachers, never, never other children so actually very good relationships with other children.

I: Right ok

P2: erm... but it was just incredibly difficult and he. . . what he was doing at school is work, it was almost completely like in his head something catastrophic has happened and his perception of everything was just, it was just kind of like he just gave in and clearly you know because he just felt completely insecure. . .erm. . . and so then they suggested, school suggested he had a trial period in the PRU erm so the could do an assessment with him erm so he went to a PRU in [nearby area]. . and that was obviously a big moment but we kind of agreed to it because it was a trial and they were going to do an assessment.

I: What did you think about it at the time?

P2: It was hard, I mean it was hard because it was a PRU and all your preconceptions of a PRU erm but also it had got to the stage where every day I was getting a phone call

I: Yeah

P2: or you know it was, we were dreading taking him into school, he was clearly not happy erm he would start to erm his behaviour would start to deteriorate just before we went out of the door. . . on the way to school it was just becoming unmanageable

I: Yeah

P2: And it was really affecting the home environment, affecting his erm and obviously you're always aware of the impact on his younger brother

I: Yeah

P2: so then we went to, we went to the PRU, the PRU actually the teacher who ran it was brilliant and amazing erm I look back on it and I don't think they have a huge amount of . . . what she was good at was just strategies for helping him to learn and to cope, there's no kind of underlying kind of tackling of the emotional, mental health issues that he has effectively and your missing with a cohort that are, it isn't the right environment because you're mixing with kids who are basically are in families where they are witnessing you know they're going through their own

difficulties and the parenting you know, it's not the right environment for kids with attachment disorder.

I: Yeah

P2: and they kind of recognised that and they then helped [primary school] erm they had a really good plan for getting him back into [primary school] erm and they worked with the school [name] so the staff from [primary school] went into erm it was the end of the term, it was the end of year 1 I think it was err any how then he then went back into [primary school] and at first again another honeymoon period and then he had an EHCP which again had been a very long process to get an EHCP

I: Righ

P2: and the PRU were like he shouldn't be in the PRU this isn't the right environment for him erm... so [primary school] took him back, they took him back, at first the honeymoon period and then it started to slip and erm and then it ended up part time schooling erm actually being part time schooling errr the previous time the time before he went into the PRU he ended up part time schooling again erm and I'll come to that in a minute because I feel quite cross about that. Ermm and we were aware that he wasn't happy it was just like he was aggressive everyday and it was just like, it felt like all that was happening was he was being contained erm

I: mmm

P2: and then err there was an awful lot of communication going on with the school, you know from us and we got Ed Psychs involved erm and then finally they effectively did a part time exclusion which happened really quickly and wasn't handled particularly well erm in my opinion and then we managed to get the place in the PRU so again it was just literally they were expecting him to just home schooled and

I: Oh right

P2: I was like no, we need to find, there's an obligation, luckily through my own contacts and I'm not being arrogant but literally through my relationship with the PRU Headteacher who you know the woman that runs the PRU, we managed to get him back in the PRU a bit and then we heard about this [Name] which is this resourced provision which is a class within a school, there is one in [neighbouring local authority] and they've just opened one in [another local authority] and

basically he went in there, again a honeymoon period and that disintegrated sadly but interestingly they were saying we can manage it, they didn't want him to leave but we were just like nothing is happening here, he's not getting an education, literally all they are doing is containing him, they're not meeting, they were brilliant again absolutely brilliant, the woman that runs it, just amazing but basically it turned into, because an overspill of the PRU, the kind of kids that were going in there, it wasn't actually fulfilling what, it's meant to be a halfway house between a PRU and a mainstream school and the idea is you're meant to integrate them into the mainstream school and it became clear to us that he's just not going to get back into a mainstream school, he started to kind of, he started to disintegrate and you know they managed it really well

I: mmm

P2: So we then said to them, we said err listen we don't think this is working and we had heard through various people about this amazing school, which is a residential school called [Name] which is in [area] which is miles away.

I: mmm

P2: erm and . . . it's like one of, it's like the leading, the leading place in the country for like kids who've suffered extreme trauma, it's really expensive for the council if I'm honest, significant costs for the council and we had a big battle but we got him into that school

I: Oh

P2: so then we told the, erm . . .so all of this like, if I was sending a main message, I would say like all of it is basically you're just fighting on your own, it's absolutely crazy, like people are so, anyhow I'm slightly jumping around

I: No, no it's fine

P2: anyway I'll just finish the narrative so basically then he's gone into the [residential school] and partly if I'm honest it came to the point where we weren't able to manage him. We were able to manage him at home but it was starting to have a detrimental effect on his brother erm who was kind of we were noticing he was picking up things from him and we felt like it wasn't an environment which was fair to his brother and we always kind of, in a way, you know all the attention had been on [older son] we just felt we were, [younger son] was going to suffer so

[younger son] has so yeah so [younger son] is in mainstream school by and large as well, has little wobbles, does have wobbles, I'll come to that but he's very different to [older son], [older son] is at the [residential school] and he comes home one in every four weekends and the holidays and that's kind of you know and that feels manageable for everybody erm it's obviously really sad that it's ended up like this erm.

I: and has he adjusted to the move?

P2: erm no he's quite

I: You know you've said there's usually a honeymoon period and then. . .

P2: No and again there was a honeymoon period but he, over the summer, so he started just before, it's very early days so he's only been there in total about 12 weeks now erm and the summer holiday was in between and he was very angry at the beginning of the summer holidays and it's like the reality of the situation it just fulfils that I look what happens everyone gives up on me, everybody hates me erm I mean he doesn't express it like that but that's what he's expressed that through kind of play erm and he's given up to some degree, his behaviour is challenging there but they are brilliant and amazing and so yeah, so that's the story, its quite a like

I: Sounds like you've been on a very long journey

P2: oh yeah, it has been a long journey

I: So what's the timescale, how long has all that process taken?

P2: So the process started in the start of year 1 and err and it finished in, at the end of year 3.

I: So it took a couple of years?

P2: so yeah it took a couple of years so we got and if I'm really honest the point at which we, things moved we, is when we said there is a safeguarding risk from [older son] to [younger son]

I: Yeah

P2: so at that point then things started to happen and in a way you know I feel is quite ridiculous in a way because it's quite . . . but that's how the system works and the ridiculousness about it is. . . everything, I've just felt that everything is driven by the parents, absolutely everything, I feel, the things that make me cross, so actually,

I'll start with the positive, the things which make me, which I'm impressed by are erm if you find the right support then there is some amazing people there who kind of help and provide guidance,

I: What makes them amazing? What is it that they do?

P2: I think it's kind of . . . erm I think nearly everybody I speak to, and it's interesting because the [residential school] where he's at there's quite a lot of adopted children there and there's only about 30 children in the school erm about 35 kids in the school and I think there's about 12 who are adopted, the rest in foster care. The twelve kids who are there all the parents will talk about how they felt blamed at some point erm and that schools view everything through the prism of . . . all of them in this adoption group, it's like sitting there and just hearing the same story we have, that basically schools go through this situation where they blame the parents erm and actually we kind of got past that point quite quickly because we were so engaged but like when I talk engaged I mean like everyday meetings, the level, the level of communication you know communication book, constant emails, drawing in constant experts, direct communication the educational psychologist, direct communication with [older son], he went to a professor of child psychology at the university of [city] and [city] hospital and he's just this real expert a national expert and he, we kind of got him in there. . . CAMHS have got a specific adoption person who you know we were in constant contact with them erm but they were amazing because they didn't they were empathetic to what we were going through, so sometimes the lack of empathy was extraordinary from the school. So I kind of . . . you know there are a minority of comments but there was a classic case where they kept on expecting us to do home schooling at short notice and literally, I went part time, [husband] works full time and we were dead flexible but my parent are not particularly nearby they're an hour away and they, erm and they struggle with [older son] and [husband's] parents aren't anywhere, his dad is dead and his mum is miles away and sometimes we didn't have the options to always do homeschool but we kept on doing it and I kept on changing my rota, it was crazy and it went on for weeks and then one day I just said to them, said to the teaching assistant, today I'm interviewing people for a job and [husband] is interviewing people for a job as well erm I wont be able to home school today and they did this hardball thing like erm

they looked a bit shocked and then the following day the teaching assistant said to me I spoke to the headteacher and she said that if you didn't erm , that if they couldn't contact you because you were in your interview they would have to call social services. . . and I was like. . . I was so gobsmacked because I'd been incredibly constructive you know and the school had said to me you know you're kind of like perfect parents, you engage and we really like thank you, I mean that was a while later but at that point I went really, like when I next saw the SENCO, I was un a meeting and I really laid it on thick and they did apologise and I said you know for starters you just try calling social workers, social services would laugh their heads off you know come, like they're going to have time to deal with the fact you know and how much home schooling have I done, how much you know actually we shouldn't be home schooling him you know and I hear that time after time of adopted kids, erm I. . . you know so that was an example of really bad practice, other bad practice was just a kind of and I'm much better at this with [younger son] now, so [younger son] had a bit of a wobble at the beginning of this term erm transitions, classic transitions are always difficult for him, erm and so I said can we have a communication book and things, he's doing really well actually, I'm really proud of him but what I find is often you get, they're so worried about upsetting you and partly because they kind of, they do care that you get this kind of very slightly passive aggressive going around the houses, so I kind of had to give them permission to just say just be blunt, just say so this is what has happened today, give a factual account, don't spin it don't kind of worry about my feelings I just need to know where we're at

I: Yeah

P2: and you know just a very factual account and then you can do the positive stuff but first I need to know what has happened. . . and so . . . and the other thing and so the only other thing that really wound me up was erm . . . they said so after he went in the PRU he went and learnt, when he came back into school, he learnt quite a few swear words

I: right

P2: and he, so, pardon my language but so 'fuck off' and 'bitch' and 'cock' erm anyhow he used them and then the school, there was a meeting between the school

err, the social worker, the post adoption support worker and I think the PRU were there as well and after the PRU lady and the social worker told us, he's using the word 'cock' erm and they were asking where that has come from and err you know has that come from the parents, and I was absolutely furious about that and actually I think the social worker got bollocked for telling, like this is ridiculous woman was telling u as well and the PRU woman was. . . also said. . . I think. . . I think they were like, I think there was a slight element of like. . . they'd never experienced anything like it with [older son] and his behaviour was really challenging, they didn't know how to manage it, they felt completely out of their depth. The deputy head, lacked any kind of empathy and you know there was no kind of sense, not until the end, actually when he left the school and I saw the headteacher did the headteacher say I feel for you, I so feel for you, we've always felt for you and it's like nowhere along the line did you actually say that. You know, do you know what I mean, it's just like, you know and when he left the school, you know endings are obviously a massive thing for [older son], he slapped the teacher across the face and quite hard I think and . . . I think she got the impression, I think she said enough is enough, which is fine, but I had this strange, I was always, I always found it quite difficult to get on with her, I was always cheery and positive and constructive but literally there was always a slight air that she was, she reacted sometimes as though she was traumatised as though she was a little bit like she was a victim

I: Right

P2: and nothing kind of explicitly said but just like and so I sense that when he left, so I said that lets go through, they were going to temporary expel him, and I said yes because there was nothing, I just thought it's not working and we just need to move on erm and I also managed to get, I had seen it coming, so I managed to get the place at the PRU which was incredible because it was full at the PRU blah blah blah but I knew it was a short term, and I knew also I have foreseen it and had a plan in place but they didn't know that necessarily, but she was like they didn't do, I kept on having to nag them, I emailed them eight times to get them to send him a goodbye card, to get them to send him a card

I: Aww

P2: and I even, it was all slightly shrouded in mystery as to what had actually happened on the final day and I said I kind of need to know what happened, it's a reasonable expectation and I had to nag them to have a meeting and I asked them about 5 times and in the end they had the meeting and it was kind of like yeah that slightly passive aggressive, not wanting to upset me. . . not that they had ever seen me upset because I was, I was always very matter of fact and very calm about it, very kind of lets work it through, what are our next steps blah blah blah, so and the thing about what really frustrates me is, and I think they learned a lot of lessons from it. . .i don't think they'd had, they'd gone through adoption training midway through their experience with [older son] but that was quite staggering because it's [local area] and there are so many adopted children in [local area]

I: Are there?

P2: Oh my god it is like, so [younger son's] year, there's an adopter's group for [primary school] and there's an adopter's group for [another primary school] but there's also kids, it's, there's some stat about there's probably more adopted kids per population than practically anywhere else in the country

I: Really?

P2: yeah

I: I didn't know that

P2: yeah it's like there's load of, I mean in [younger son's] class there's about, a class of 30 there's about 5 adopted kids, and that's typical in each class

I: wow

P2: yeah, it's extraordinary

I: does he know that?

P2: err, he knows of others but he wouldn't necessarily know 5 and erm some of the parents are not particularly open about it but erm he knows individuals who are adopted.

I: Is that. . . does that make a difference to him

P2: yeah it does make a difference to him

I: mmm

P2: yeah it does, it does make a difference to him, I think it makes a difference to him, he's not had a massive kind of adoption hasn't been, you know he'll sometimes

talk about his mum and missing his mum, he's not seen, he can't, you know we were saying before but the concept of having a mum so yeah so it is I think they learnt a lot of lessons, I think the key things for me are like, particularly if it's really challenging at home, I think you have to really empathetic, I think you know the default position sometimes you know is there's something wrong with, and not, we've rarely had this but I know so many adopted parents have had so we've been lucky but the default position is, the parents must be doing something wrong erm, we were very lucky mainly because we were so in there and we were really constructive but I know other parents

I: But that sounds like it was driven by you and. . .

P2: totally 100% driven by me

I: you weren't invited in

P2: no, no, no, it was a part time, it was like a part time job,

I: Yeah

P2: I mean literally I have about that amount [hand gesture] of emails, over the two years between school, between different experts, I went on every single adoption training course I bloody could, I read every bloody book I could read, you know it was insane, you know and I think the thing is the trauma from the child passes through to everyone else, it's like a ripple effect erm and I think it passes through the staff at school as well.

I: With that do you mean that they're kind of. . . experiencing his trauma or that he's traumatising them?

P2: no, I think well, I think some of them would say he was traumatising them but I think it's more that he wants you to feel his pain and feel his trauma and your kind of absorbing that and I think they find that very, very difficult erm [another primary school] have an adopters group and they have experts that come to the adopters group and there a really brilliant network and so I think gradually a lot of adoptive parents are starting to put their kids in [this school] depressingly I know a fair number of adoptive parents who've pulled their kids out of [primary school] because they've felt they're not getting the right support and there is often this thing about, and I see this with [younger son], to be fair they are really trying with [younger son] actually, mainly again because I'm [gesture],

I: Yeah

P2: but erm being all cheery and smiley and not criticising them because I've found that as soon as I've criticised them they're usually defensive erm but what im finding is that the kids erm, if they haven't got an EHCP which is really difficult to get, so they haven't got a one to one worker. . . once they hit year 2 there's not the same level of teaching assistants so the teaching assistants cover goes a little bit so theres only one teaching assistant for the whole year for the two classes erm and that is a massive thing for the adopted kids so I think what would tend to happen is they will erm just tick along, err the kids and they fall further and further behind. So from the adopters group I hear that all the time that err gradually across the course of the schooling they fall further and further behind and there's no intervention not necessarily any intervention particularly as they get older in the primary school.

I: is it that they're falling behind academically?

P2: Academically, Yeah academically, erm

I: What do think it is that makes it different for the adopted children, why is it that the adopted children are falling behind?

P2: because I think it's that kind of feeling of, I think it's a feeling of. . . I think there's something about them not feel secure and confident in. . . so quite a lot of them will talk about this kind of erm. . . this distraction, a common feeling is this sense of distraction, that there's a sense they're not settled in the classroom.

I: Ok

P2: So they're not necessarily being mega disruptive, they've not necessarily got learning difficulties or anything that merits an EHCP but they are distracted and not able to focus in the way the other children do and is that something about the environment, the transitions of the day erm I'm not sure those things are necessarily, necessarily broken down and they were, but I think interestingly and it really depends on the teacher erm. I get frustrated like, so the transitions interesting so every time I kind of like start banging on about the transition before the end of the year and then slightly they seem a bit slow on it and he has a bit of a wobble at the beginning of the year, [younger son] and I've kind of picked this up you know from nursery to reception, reception to year one, year one to year two

and actually I kind of think you kind of go straight into year 2 and straight in year 1 and I don't get a sense they phase it enough

I: Yeah

P2: erm. . .

I: Is that in terms of the work

P2: in terms of the work but I also think that like the timetable of how its going to be different between the year 1 timetable and the year 2 timetable. I think theres something about, they might say it differently but the hunch I get is that. . .it's like business as usual this is how we're going to do things this year, you know kind of like . . .it's overwhelming is the emotion that [younger son] would feel. Erm yeah.

I: Sounds like it has been really tough

P2: yeah it has, it has been really tough

I: and how has [husband] been in all this?

P2: Well both of us have found it difficult erm err and is suppose because I'm part time in a weird kind of way I have more control over it so im kind of you know, I think [husband] finds that a little more difficult because literally he hasn't got the time to do the same level of interventions like you know

I: So you take the lead

P2: yeah definitely because I'm part time err and there's always a kind of sense that you have to kind of stop yourself from kind of, with [younger son] because [older son] it ended so sadly for [older son] your always hyperaware that, you're always worried that, you've got to stop yourself over worrying about [younger son] because when he has a wobble it's not the same as anything that has happened to [older son] but because you've experienced it with [older son] you're kind of like oh shit it's all going to, pardon my language, it's all going into like. . . you know it's all heading in the same way

I: Yeah

P2: and actually it's not and you're able to get through to [younger son] in a way that [older son] not able to get through, interestingly the things that kind of surprise me a little bit are when [younger son] had his school report and his teacher was really lovely, she was great and they did this reading recovery intervention which has really, really helped him and his reading age rose by a year and a half in just a

matter of kind of two months and it's really great and that was one to one and it shows the power of one to one support

I: Yeah

P2: so that really worked. So at the end of the year I had been saying, you know every parents evening was kind of, parents session was like he's doing really well, he's a lovely boy and you know the importance is his emotional health with everything going on with [older son] absolutely true

I: Yeah

P2: but a little bit funny at the end of the year I get his school report and its like he's behind in every single thing apart from kind of PE and that was like, I wish I'd known you know again it's about kind of just be blunt and be honest so, kind of had a meeting with them and I said you know what are we going to put into place so he doesn't fall behind further and one of the main solutions was for Maths, you know have you thought about private tuition.

I: Ohh

P2: and erm

I: So nothing they were going to do?

P2: to be fair they did in the end, to be fair they did err and I'm giving them a little bit of time because actually he is engaging really well at the moment and he's still doing reading recovery but I'm kind of I'm slightly on the case. But we ended up doing, we ended up falling for the private tuition because he just, he wasn't learning anything in maths he was just like and theres a woman that's like a SENCO. . . a teacher whose a SENCO elsewhere in [local area] in a school with loads of adopted kids and she does it on the side and erm so we go, she's amazing, she's brilliant and he goes there every Saturday morning, but it err you know, it is something I would have wanted to avoid because I also don't want to put any pressure on him. As it happens she is amazing and she's brilliant and she's lovely but there is something about this area where sadly, I wouldn't pick this school again not because . . .it's the worst school on planet earth, it's not but basically it is a school for high achieving kids and a lot of the kids are like, it's all of the chitter chatters about kind of the grammar school and trying to get into [name] Grammar and whose having private tuition to try to get them into [name] Grammar. The parents are like GPs and you

know and academics and you know its all very. . . and that's good in a way because they're mixing with kids who have got great language skills but I think there is something about, I think if you put them into a school where it's full of more sort of average kids and there's also better special needs support then I think you would kind of, I think you would do even better. But you don't know that really, until you like go on a journey and like he's got loads of mates and he really like loves his mates and it's hard, you don't want to cause any more separations in his life you know

I: Yeah

P2: so. . . so it's kind of. Other parents as I've said other parents have pulled their kids out and erm

I: and is that because of the pressure or the lack of support?

P2: I think, they feel like the lack of support and they just saw their kids falling further and further behind and so where they can quite a few of them, there's a school in [county] which is kind of quite famous for, it's not a special needs school, but its erm it takes special needs kids and they've moved to [county], I mean their dedication is extraordinary.

I: wow really?

P2: yeah they moved to [county] but partly they're loaded [laughter]

I: So they can do that [laughter]

P2: yeah so they can, and he works, like basically one of them, one dad has given up their job and the other dad err travels all around the world, like and you know, so basically he's, you know they can do it because they're earning mega bucks but erm the class sizes are 14 kids to a class

I: Wow

P2: so yeah

I: that's amazing

P2: so it's, yeah its very, it's very difficult because you. . . you just. . . the adopters groups will talk frequently about how their kid fell further and further behind and the school didn't really have an answer for that erm

I: and do you think that is just specific to that school?

P2: I hear that a lot, I do hear that a lot about erm and about the kid is not able to, the kid isn't necessarily, they're not expressing, there's something about they're confidence in saying I don't understand this, I'm stuck and erm and about keeping your head down and retreating into yourself and not having the confidence, the levels of confidence other children would have.

I: Yeah

P2: erm

I: so what do you think would, on reflection with [older son] what do you think, do you think anything could have made things better in terms of school?

P2: well I think it's interesting there's an article in the guardian the other day that erm, it's worth looking it up actually, about a school in, they're currently trying to establish a school in Norfolk

I: I think I read about that

P2: yeah it's really interesting, so they're, I think you know erm. . . and I think the closest thing to that is probably the resourced provision class system which is at [school name, neighbouring area] and this is for [name] city council, this is the only one I know and then there's one in [another neighbouring area] the challenge of it is, and I think they're trying to address it now, I think they kind of learned their lesson because basically it was just turning into a PRU.

I: Yeah they tend to eventually, just sort of send kids there.

P2: Yeah and I think they're being more assertive about who they take and who they don't take. But I think that model, that school is a really, and it can't be for all adopted kids but I think [older son] should have gone in there to that kind of environment earlier on and erm if it hadn't had kids who were basically PRU kids, I think he would have, erm I think he would have not had the catastrophic change of perception of his world, because the problem is, I'm convinced that if you don't get the school right and the child disintegrates at school then the impact is felt in the home environment and I reckon adoption disruptions as a result, breakdowns just massively increase erm I think there needs to be more, you know I think if they showed us more empathy then it would have felt less of a lonely existence.

I: Yeah

P2: I think the problem with the lack of information, so you're presented with here's a list of schools with like and the Ed Psych's for some reason are, we had a great Ed psych but the system for some reason stops them . . .

I: from naming

P2: from naming or even, I don't even necessarily want her to name but it was like this is the kind of model of what you want but it was so, like they were so reluctant to do that and it felt like, it felt like that was daft. The system is way too slow, so for [older son], for me applying to the [residential school] took six months, even though we were saying, we were saying we were worried this is going to disrupt, we were worried this is going into total crisis situation, we're saying safeguarding from [older son] to [younger son], six months!

I: Gosh

P2: I mean they were literally, and the EHCP guy was great and he actually asked for a review, because it's an education, health and social care, they just, everything took an age and it was a lot of money but it somehow needs to be a system in which it is much much quicker. They had all the information there you know and they were, god knows these cases are always going to be complex but like literally, it wasn't the case that they didn't have all the information, it was literally like, it just took forever to get the people in the room to make the decision and the panel would meet and then one of them would ask a question which was actually already in the information but they're not necessarily come across it and that would delay it again and they would have to wait for the next slot and it was just, it went on for six months, and literally it was me, having all, driving all the communication with the [residential school] because then I, there was no guarantee he was going to get the place at the [residential school] because they only take a certain number of kids, they only take kids who fit the profile so a little bit is less about extreme autism or anything like that it's about trauma and kids that have been traumatised and attachment disorder and . . . I can't, it was me driving, why is it me driving this, it was nuts. There was no one, there's meant to be a virtual head, she was like a chocolate teapot, I mean like she was absolutely hopeless, I gave up, she'd attend the odd meeting, if anything I knew more than she did and she just, nothing happened, you know. . . you know. . . and I suppose you kind of, it shouldn't be. . . I

honestly think that if you didn't drive it yourself, you know I work in kind of, I work in a profession where I have to communicate and I have to get answers and I have to chase things and I have to, I kind of don't take no for an answer, you know I have to look at the long game and I have to be constructive and erm. . . and literally, if I didn't have those skills, and I didn't work part time it would have ended up in disruption and I'm dead proud of myself for doing it. . . but I think a lot of parents would have just gone, I can't cope and it would have disrupted and actually that's the worst thing for him you know, partly you know, that's I love him to death, you know he's just amazing but he's also incredibly challenging erm. . . and I just, I just, it really makes me annoyed that the system cant cope, I don't understand why there isn't kind of like, ok we've got a kid with an attachment disorder so here's the potential check list for the kind of things you should be doing at school, here's the potential checklist of erm . . . and then here's the potential checklist of erm you know. . . and if this doesn't work out this is what we're going to do next, there's no one, there's no infrastructure around, it's like odd uncoordinated bodies and I suppose the virtual head should be doing that for adopted kids but they just

I: they don't do they?

P2: they don't

I: no erm, how did you cope through all that then? You must have been incredibly strong.

P2: erm I mean it has been like, I think I kind of just kept my, I just had to, I just saw that, I almost compartmentalised it and saw it as like a project, a work project.

I: so you went into work mode?

P2: I went into work mode and like you know this is a problem and this is this and it's only when he actually went into school 12 weeks ago that afterwards for about and still to this day I'm kind of slightly left reeling from it, I mean both of us are which is slightly like what the fuck happened, what was that about you know, what was that about in terms of like. . . having a child where, you know we were really clear about our expectations about we could manage we were very very clear and I know there are unknowns but actually it wasn't unknown

I: No it doesn't sound like it from what you've said

P2: and actually we got, you know if we wanted to sue them we could like, I reckon there would be like a really strong case, I don't, and I can't be, I haven't got the energy and time to do it but if you want to take legal action there's things like you know, erm we didn't get the paediatrician report until after we had adopted him and stuff like that and then and you know the line that you know he's perfect and you know he won't remember anything and erm and all that is just an utter utter nonsense now that we know. But we're left kind of, we are left reeling from it, reeling from what has happened, desperately trying to you know make sure, not desperately but make sure that [younger son] protected and still that's an ongoing challenge. [older son] comes home in the holidays all of that, our lives are just taken up totally with like 24-7 [older son] and your like a full time carer for [older son] and it felt like you were just caring for [older son] all your childcare, there's no understanding from the school like that your, you don't have the child care that everyone else has because you can't place him in an after school club, you know. Another thing they massively underestimated was like, you know they'd mention at the drop of a hat, they'd just say oh yeah so the PRU finished at 2 o'clock and the resourced provision finishes at 2 o'clock and your like. . . oh god, I've got a job and how, and the job isn't just kind of about the money, because we're not on the poverty line or anything but the job is also about, it was the only time where I was able to switch off.

I: Yeah, it was your thing

P2: and I'd already kind of you know, I'd already gone part time and blah blah blah and it was just a little bit like, no one really quite understanding that erm. . . of just how challenging he was on a day to day basis you know erm. . . no one saying how are you? You know Are you alright you know, actually, that's not strictly true but no one at school saying that you know erm and then having to go through every expert you went through, it felt like your having to go through it all over again, you know, explaining the der der der der der you know and erm. . . and that's just like, there wasn't just like, you know I lost sight of the number of times- sorry for having to get you to go through this again, you know, not joined up. So it has had a real impact on us and erm and we're kind of left reeling but we're starting to kind of breath again

I: good

P2: you know and starting a life and the contrast when [older son] is here and [older son] is not here . . . it's just a different world and I think what is great to hear that at the [residential school] where he is at the moment there is total, hearing other adoptive parents saying, a total I've gone through worse, it doesn't seem possible but it is the case, they have been blamed, they have been, I mean like we have been really lucky compared to what some of the parents have been through like the suspicion they have been under the blame the kind of like the lack of understanding, the lack of empathy. . . we've been really lucky you know, compared to the majority of them it's shocking.

I: and how do you deal with that blame and stay strong and still keep that belief what you are doing?

P2: well I mean because you do have days when you kind of like am I just making a right mess of this, I suppose I've got a really good support network of friends so err, my family live a bit away from here and my parents are quite old and so they weren't necessarily able and they couldn't really cope with him but I've got four best mates erm one of whom has adopted herself erm, my best mate is amazing you know he's brilliant and then my two other mates and literally they have like a little, when it was getting really tough they were having a rota of coming, each of them would come one weekend, just to kind of support me and support us erm. . . but then I think there was something about, I had a goal and a mission and when, once I knew what the next step was I was able to break it down into bits and kind of like ok I know this is what I've got to do next, erm when it just feels unmanageable was when you didn't know what the options were and you didn't know what you could do and you didn't have anything else to try and it felt like you kind of hit a brick wall. That's when you felt, but sadly you just then, have to, it's like playing a card, it's not playing cards but it was literally like you know mentioning safe guarding risks from [older son] to [younger son] and it was talk about adoption disruption, its shouldn't be that way, you're having to say those things to get anyone to move erm and the system doesn't recognise, I don't think for the length of time, the 6 months it took to get him into the [residential school], like I am still staggered by that and to be fair they were staggered by it but they're just a little bit like yeah, this is how it is but I suppose we stay strong by being, having a support network, having a plan. . . I think

kind of intellectualising his behaviour so you didn't take it personally, really helped, so it kind of proper specific insights on why he was doing what he was doing and the best experts really helped like generic stuff was just like, whatever I've heard that all before, but knowing, this Professor G, he does this because of this and der, der, der it helps depersonalise it because it is so personal because he's saying the most personal, horrendous things and he's hurting you and der, der, der, der, der. The thing I would find most difficult was when he would lash out at his brother erm but I just had to kind of, I think in my head saying, kind of I think both of us deciding that effectively you are caring for him, you're a carer, I think that really helped and also accepting where he was at, so for a while it was like kind of you know denial and then it just had to be right there is something really fundamentally wrong here and accepting that. Because people say to you, yeah oh and they give you false hope and you know we're going to turn this around and you know actually. . .because people say it and then it doesn't happen you stop believing it. You know the [residential school] are really careful how they say it and they don't give you any false hope, you know they'll say you know, hears an example, we've got an examples where they've gone on to do really, really well, they'll always face challenges these children. We've had examples where they've not made much progress but we've had examples where they've made loads of progress and this is what it looks like, that is what you need, a bit more sophistication you know rather than the kind of oh you know it's going to be fine, it's going to be great

I: Yeah. . . I'm just conscious of time

P2: oh yeah, oh my god I've chatted away, I've got to go sorry.

I: No it's fine

P2: once you got me started. . .

I: thank you for sharing that

P2: no it's alright

I: and wow what a journey you've been through

P2: yeah

I: and you're going through

P2: yeah

I: but it does sound like it's very much about drawing on your own resources, friends, family. . .

P2: totally

I: . . . skills, knowledge and I don't know maybe, it seems like that support is missing from the professionals around that's the kind of feeling I've got from what you've said.

P2: 100%

I: it seems that there is a gap there

P2: there is a gap there and also its all about personal connections, it shouldn't be that way. If I'm honest, I work for [company] and erm its interesting that when I sent an email from my personal account and I shouldn't send emails from my [company] account because it's a work account blah blah blah but sometimes you know you've got an Iphone der der der and I keep work different, really really separate because you know erm from my kind of personal life. When I'd send an email from a [company] email account erm my personal [company] account as opposed to my home email account, the speed in which it got answered.

I: really

P2: yeah, it's just like, I was never going to use anything connected to [company] but it was like he works for [company] maybe he's like. . .it's nuts it shouldn't be that way, like if I was a single parent, a single parent adopter working full time you'd be absolutely, pardon my language fucked, it's immoral, it's changed my politics to be honest

I: has it?

P2: yeah massively because its just like. . . I think the general public would think there is a safety net and there a kind of, there's not there's a massive, there's all these professionals dotted around and there is the EHCP system but like it just like, the champions, there's no one championing going like right hold on what are we doing here you know

I: yeah

P2: I'd better go

I: thank you, no thank you.

Interview

Stage 3: Abbreviated Transcription: Kevin

1 . . . they've got the same mum. Yeah and they're 6 and 8 now . . . so we adopted
2 them 5 years ago, do you want me to tell you our story?
3 . . .we adopted them 5 years ago when they were 3 and 1 . . . they had very different
4 lives, very different kind of backgrounds . . . the older child . . . had witnessed
5 extreme trauma . . . has got real attachment issues. The younger child was removed
6 at 4 days old from his birth mum and was only with one set of foster carers. The
7 older child was with lots of different foster carers with different standards of foster
8 care . . . So we've had quite a journey, because right from the offset, I think things
9 have changed now, but right from the offset we were told that they . . . didn't have
10 any attachment issues or behavioural issues and from day one, clearly not the case.
11 So it has been, our older child, in fact he's just had an assessment actually where
12 basically the gist of it was, he has very strong disorganised attachment disorder.
13 There's extensive trauma and in effective he's kind of frozen at two years of age,
14 well actually just before two years old where he witnessed a lot of very extreme
15 things and suffered extreme neglect. . . so we felt quite naive because we kind of
16 took the social workers on face value . . . some of the things they've said now has
17 made us quite cross you know, 'he wont remember, he wont remember the things
18 that have happened to him.' It's just . . . massively ignorant and actually, two social
19 workers involved in the case both have been moved on really quickly afterwards. So
20 we've been on a real journey where . . . we found it very challenging at home . . .
21 dealing with temper tantrums . . . very, very, controlling behaviour, and at first at
22 school. . . in nursery and reception it didn't really manifest itself, there was no
23 demand and he's a bright lad . . . and very charming, gorgeous . . . and then he hit
24 year one and the jump and the deterioration was practically overnight. . . I was at
25 work, we had a phone call from school saying . . . they had to escort all children out
26 of the class . . . he was running around on tops of tables, it was literally overnight, it
27 was almost a catastrophic reaction in his head. I think it was. . . always going to
28 happen, I think it was demand, he didn't have an attachment with the teacher, I
29 mean maybe it wasn't always going to happen but I think . . . He's been diagnosed
30 with oppositional defiance disorder, that phraseology . . . from that point on things

31 kind of deteriorated. He didn't have an attachment with the teacher . . . she wasn't
32 particularly empathetic but also she wasn't very assertive either which for him is like
33 having the worst combination for him actually. . . so then it kind of carried on for a
34 long time, well it felt like a long time where . . . we were communicating lots with
35 school and school was communicating lots with us. He then switched classes to a
36 better teacher. . . there was often the honeymoon period, what we've noticed with
37 education is there's a honeymoon period and then it kind of disintegrates again. So
38 he went into another class in the same cohort in the same year . . . and things just
39 got worse, hitting, kicking teachers, never, never other children so actually very
40 good relationships with other children . . . but it was just incredibly difficult . . . what
41 he was doing at school . . . it was almost completely like in his head something
42 catastrophic has happened and his perception of everything was just, it was just kind
43 of like he just gave in and clearly you know because he just felt completely insecure.
44 . . and so then . . . school suggested he had a trial period in the PRU . . . so they could
45 do an assessment with him . . . so he went to a PRU in [nearby area]. . and that was
46 obviously a big moment but we kind of agreed to it because it was a trial and they
47 were going to do an assessment. . . It was hard, I mean it was hard because it was a
48 PRU and all your preconceptions of a PRU but also it had got to the stage where
49 every day I was getting a phone call. Or you know, we were dreading taking him into
50 school, he was clearly not happy . . . his behaviour would start to deteriorate just
51 before we went out of the door. . . on the way to school it was just becoming
52 unmanageable. And it was really affecting the home environment . . . and obviously
53 you're always aware of the impact on his younger brother. So then . . . we went to
54 the PRU . . . actually the teacher who ran it was brilliant and amazing. I look back on
55 it and . . . what she was good at was just strategies for helping him to learn and to
56 cope, there's no kind of underlying . . . tackling of the emotional, mental health
57 issues that he has effectively . . . it isn't the right environment because you're mixing
58 with kids who . . . basically are in families where . . . they're going through their own
59 difficulties and . . . it's not the right environment for kids with attachment disorder.
60 . . and they kind of recognised that and . . . they had a really good plan for getting
61 him back into [primary school] . . . and they worked with the school [name] . . . it
62 was the end of year 1 . . . he then went back into [primary school] and at first again

63 another honeymoon period and then he had an EHCP which again had been a very
64 long process to get an EHCP. . . and the PRU were like he shouldn't be in the PRU
65 this isn't the right environment for him . . . so [primary school] took him back . . .
66 and then it started to slip . . . and then it ended up part time schooling . . . actually . .
67 . before he went into the PRU he ended up part time schooling again . . . and I'll
68 come to that in a minute because I feel quite cross about that. . . and we were aware
69 that he wasn't happy it was just like he was aggressive every day and it felt like all
70 that was happening was he was being contained . . . and then . . . there was an
71 awful lot of communication going on with the school, you know from us and we got
72 Ed Psychs involved . . . and then finally they effectively did a part time exclusion
73 which happened really quickly and wasn't handled particularly well . . . in my opinion
74 and then we managed to get the place in the PRU so . . . they were expecting him to
75 just home schooled and . . . I was like no, we need to find, there's an obligation,
76 luckily through my own contacts and I'm not being arrogant but literally through my
77 relationship with the PRU Headteacher who you know the woman that runs the
78 PRU, we managed to get him back in the PRU a bit and then we heard about this
79 [Name] which is this resourced provision which is a class within a school, there is
80 one in [neighbouring local authority] and they've just opened one in [another local
81 authority] and basically he went in there, again a honeymoon period and that
82 disintegrated sadly but interestingly they were saying we can manage it, they didn't
83 want him to leave but we were just like nothing is happening here, he's not getting
84 an education, literally all they are doing is containing him . . . they were brilliant
85 again absolutely brilliant, the woman that runs it, just amazing but . . . because an
86 overspill of the PRU, the kind of kids that were going in there. . . it's meant to be a
87 halfway house between a PRU and a mainstream school and the idea is you're
88 meant to integrate them into the mainstream school and it became clear to us that
89 he's just not going to get back into a mainstream school . . . he started to
90 disintegrate and you know they managed it really well. . . So we then said to them . .
91 . 'listen we don't think this is working' and we had heard through various people
92 about this amazing school, which is a residential school called [Name] which is in
93 [area] which is miles away . . . it's like the leading . . . place in the country for . . . kids
94 who've suffered extreme trauma, it's really expensive for the council if I'm honest,

95 significant costs for the council and we had a big battle but we got him into that
96 school . . . if I was sending a main message, I would say . . . basically you're just
97 fighting on your own, it's absolutely crazy . . . anyway I'll just finish the narrative so
98 basically then he's gone into the [residential school] and partly if I'm honest it came
99 to the point where we weren't able to manage him. We were able to manage him
100 at home but it was starting to have a detrimental effect on his brother . . . we were
101 noticing he was picking up things from him and we felt like it wasn't an environment
102 which was fair to his brother and . . . you know all the attention had been on [older
103 son] we just felt . . . [younger son] was going to suffer. So [younger son] . . . is in
104 mainstream school . . . does have wobbles, I'll come to that but he's very different
105 to [older son], [older son] is at the [residential school] and he comes home one in
106 every four weekends and the holidays and . . . that feels manageable for everybody .
107 .. it's obviously really sad that it's ended up like this . . . again there was a
108 honeymoon period . . . it's very early days so he's only been there in total about 12
109 weeks now . . . and the summer holiday was in between and he was very angry at
110 the beginning of the summer holidays and it's like the reality of the situation, it just
111 fulfils that 'look what happens, everyone gives up on me, everybody hates me.' . . . I
112 mean he doesn't express it like that but that's what he's expressed . . . through kind
113 of play . . . and he's given up to some degree, his behaviour is challenging there but
114 they are brilliant and amazing and . . . so that's the story . . . it has been a long
115 journey . . . So the process started in the start of year 1 and . . . it finished . . . at the
116 end of year 3. So . . . it took a couple of years . . . If I'm really honest the point at
117 which . . . things moved . . . is when we said there is a safeguarding risk from [older
118 son] to [younger son]. So at that point then things started to happen and . . . I feel
119 it's quite ridiculous in a way . . . but that's how the system works and the
120 ridiculousness about it is. . . I've just felt that everything is driven by the parents,
121 absolutely everything . . . I'll start with the positive, the things . . . which I'm
122 impressed by are . . . if you find the right support then there is some amazing
123 people there who kind of help and provide guidance. . . it's interesting because the
124 [residential school] where he's at there's quite a lot of adopted children there and
125 there's only . . . about 35 kids in the school and I think there's about 12 who are
126 adopted, the rest in foster care. The twelve kids who are there all the parents will

127 talk about how they felt blamed at some point . . . all of them in this adoption group,
128 it's like sitting there and just hearing the same story we have, that basically schools
129 go through this situation where they blame the parents . . . and actually we kind of
130 got past that point quite quickly because we were so engaged but like when I talk
131 engaged I mean like everyday meetings . . . the level of communication you know;
132 communication book, constant emails, drawing in constant experts, direct
133 communication the educational psychologist, direct communication with [older
134 son], he went to a professor of child psychology at the university of [city] and [city]
135 hospital and he's . . . a national expert and . . . we kind of got him in there. . . CAMHS
136 have got a specific adoption person who you know we were in constant contact with
137 them . . . but they were amazing because . . . they were empathetic to what we
138 were going through, so sometimes the lack of empathy was extraordinary from the
139 school . . . you know there are a minority of comments but there was a classic case
140 where they kept on expecting us to do home schooling at short notice and literally, I
141 went part time, [husband] works full time and we were dead flexible but my parent
142 are not particularly nearby they're an hour away and they . . . struggle with [older
143 son] and [husband's] parents aren't anywhere, his dad is dead and his mum is miles
144 away and sometimes we didn't have the options to always do home school but we
145 kept on doing it and I kept on changing my rota, it was crazy and it went on for
146 weeks and then one day I just . . . said to the teaching assistant, today I'm
147 interviewing people for a job and [husband] is interviewing people for a job as well .
148 . . I won't be able to home school today and they did this hardball thing like . . . they
149 looked a bit shocked and then the following day the teaching assistant said to me I
150 spoke to the headteacher and she said that . . . if they couldn't contact you because
151 you were in your interview they would have to call social services. . . I was so
152 gobsmacked because I'd been incredibly constructive you know and the school had
153 said to me . . . 'you're kind of like perfect parents, you engage and we really like
154 that, thank you.' I mean that was a while later but at that point . . . when I next saw
155 the SENCO, I was in a meeting and I really laid it on thick and they did apologise and
156 I said, 'you know for starters you just try calling social workers, social services would
157 laugh their heads off' . . . like they're going to have time to deal with . . . how much
158 home schooling have I done . . . actually we shouldn't be home schooling him you

159 know and I hear that time after time of adopted kids . . . so that was an example of
160 really bad practice, other bad practice, and I'm much better at this with [younger
161 son] now, so [younger son] had a bit of a wobble at the beginning of this term . . .
162 transitions, classic, transitions are always difficult for him, and so I said can we have
163 a communication book and things, he's doing really well actually, I'm really proud of
164 him but what I find is often . . . they're so worried about upsetting you and partly
165 because . . . they do care, that you get this kind of very slightly passive aggressive
166 going around the houses, so I kind of had to give them permission to just say, just be
167 blunt, just say so this is what has happened today, give a factual account, don't spin
168 it don't kind of worry about my feelings I just need to know where we're at . . . and
169 you know just a very factual account and then you can do the positive stuff but first I
170 need to know what has happened . . . so the only other thing that really wound me
171 up was. . . after he went in the PRU . . . when he came back into school, he learnt
172 quite a few swear words. . . pardon my language but so, 'fuck off' and 'bitch' and
173 'cock'. Anyhow he used them and then . . . there was a meeting between the
174 school, the social worker, the post adoption support worker and I think the PRU
175 were there as well, and after the PRU lady and the social worker told us, he's using
176 the word 'cock' and they were asking where that has come from and . . . you know
177 has that come from the parents? and I was absolutely furious about that and
178 actually I think the social worker got bollocked for telling, like this is ridiculous . . . I
179 think there was a slight element of. . . they'd never experienced anything like it with
180 [older son] and his behaviour was really challenging, they didn't know how to
181 manage it, they felt completely out of their depth. The deputy head, lacked any kind
182 of empathy . . . not until the end, actually when he left the school and I saw the
183 headteacher did the headteacher say I feel for you, I so feel for you, we've always
184 felt for you and it's like nowhere along the line did you actually say that. You know . .
185 . it's just like . . . when he left the school, you know endings are obviously a massive
186 thing for [older son], he slapped the teacher across the face and quite hard I think
187 and . . . I think she said enough is enough, which is fine, but . . . I always found it
188 quite difficult to get on with her, I was always cheery and positive and constructive
189 but literally there was always a slight air that she was, she reacted sometimes as
190 though she was traumatised as though she was a little bit like she was a victim and

191 nothing kind of explicitly said. . . they were going to temporary expel him, and I said
192 yes because . . . I just thought it's not working and we just need to move on and . . .
193 so I managed to get the place at the PRU which was incredible because it was full at
194 the PRU . . . but I knew it was a short term, and . . . also I had foreseen it and had a
195 plan in place but they didn't know that necessarily . . . I kept on having to nag them,
196 I emailed them eight times to get them to send him a goodbye card and . . . it was all
197 slightly shrouded in mystery as to what had actually happened on the final day and I
198 said I . . . need to know what happened, it's a reasonable expectation and I had to
199 nag them to have a meeting and I asked them about 5 times and in the end they had
200 the meeting and it was . . . that slightly passive aggressive, not wanting to upset me.
201 . . not that they had ever seen me upset because I was, I was always very matter of
202 fact and very calm about it, very kind of lets work it through, what are our next steps
203 . . . and the thing about what really frustrates me is, and I think they learned a lot of
204 lessons from it. . .they'd gone through adoption training midway through their
205 experience with [older son] but that was quite staggering because it's [local area]
206 and there are so many adopted children in [local area]. So [younger son's] year,
207 there's an adopter's group for [primary school] and there's an adopter's group for
208 [another primary school] but . . . there's some stat about there's probably more
209 adopted kids per population than practically anywhere else in the country. . . I mean
210 in [younger son's] class there's about, a class of 30 there's about 5 adopted kids, and
211 that's typical in each class. He knows of others but he wouldn't necessarily know 5
212 and some of the parents are not particularly open about it but he knows individuals
213 who are adopted . . . it does make a difference to him, I think it makes a difference
214 to him . . . you know he'll sometimes talk about his mum and missing his mum . . .
215 the concept of having a mum. . . I think they learnt a lot of lessons, I think the key
216 things for me are . . . particularly if it's really challenging at home, I think you have to
217 really empathise . . . we've rarely had this but I know so many adopted parents have
218 had. So we've been lucky, but the default position is, the parents must be doing
219 something wrong, we were very lucky mainly because we were so in there and we
220 were really constructive . . . totally 100% driven by me . . . it was like a part time job .
221 . . I mean literally I have about that amount [hand gesture] of emails, over the two
222 years between school, between different experts, I went on every single adoption

223 training course I bloody could, I read every bloody book I could read, you know it
224 was insane, you know and I think the thing is the trauma from the child passes
225 through to everyone else, it's like a ripple effect and I think it passes through the
226 staff at school as well . . . I think some of them would say he was traumatising them
227 but I think it's more that he wants you to feel his pain and feel his trauma and your
228 kind of absorbing that and I think they find that very, very difficult. [another
229 primary school] have an adopters group and they have experts that come to the
230 adopters group and there a really brilliant network and so I think gradually a lot of
231 adoptive parents are starting to put their kids in [this school]. Depressingly, I know a
232 fair number of adoptive parents who've pulled their kids out of [primary school]
233 because they've felt they're not getting the right support. And there is often this
234 thing about, and I see this with [younger son], to be fair they are really trying with
235 [younger son] actually, mainly again because I'm [gesture] . . . being all cheery and
236 smiley and not criticising, them because I've found that as soon as I've criticised
237 them they're usually defensive but what I'm finding is that the kids, if they haven't
238 got an EHCP which is really difficult to get, so they haven't got a one to one worker. .
239 . once they hit Year 2 there's not the same level of teaching assistants . . . so there's
240 only one teaching assistant for the whole year for the two classes and that is a
241 massive thing for the adopted kids. So, I think what would tend to happen is they
242 will just tick along . . . and they fall further and further behind. So from the adopters
243 group I hear that all the time that gradually across the course of the schooling they
244 fall further and further behind and there's . . . not necessarily any intervention
245 particularly as they get older in the primary school. . .

246 I: What do think it is that makes it different for the adopted children, why is it that
247 the adopted children are falling behind?

248 . . . I think there's something about them not feel secure and confident . . . so quite a
249 lot of them will talk about this kind of . . . distraction, a common feeling is this sense
250 of distraction, that there's a sense they're not settled in the classroom . . . So they're
251 not necessarily being mega disruptive, they've not necessarily got learning
252 difficulties or anything that merits an EHCP, but they are distracted and not able to
253 focus in the way the other children do and is that something about the environment,
254 the transitions of the day? I'm not sure those things are necessarily broken down . . .

255 and it really depends on the teacher. I get frustrated . . . so the transition is
256 interesting, so every time I . . . start banging on about the transition before the end
257 of the year . . . they seem a bit slow on it and he has a bit of a wobble at the
258 beginning of the year, [younger son] and I've kind of picked this up you know from
259 nursery to reception, reception to year one, year one to year two and actually I . . .
260 think you . . . go straight into year 2 and straight in year 1 and I don't get a sense
261 they phase it enough . . . in terms of the work but I also think that like the timetable
262 of how it's going to be different between the year 1 timetable and the year 2
263 timetable. I think . . . they might say it differently but the hunch I get is that. . .it's
264 like business as usual this is how we're going to do things this year . . . it's
265 overwhelming is the emotion that [younger son] would feel. . . it has been really
266 tough . . . Well both of us have found it difficult and I suppose because I'm part time
267 in a weird kind of way I have more control over it . . . I think [husband] finds that a
268 little more difficult because literally he hasn't got the time to do the same level of
269 interventions . . . because I'm part time . . . there's always a kind of sense that you
270 have to . . . stop yourself from . . . with [younger son] because [older son] it ended
271 so sadly for [older son], you're always hyperaware . . . you're always worried . . .
272 you've got to stop yourself over worrying about [younger son] because when he has
273 a wobble it's not the same as anything that has happened to [older son] but because
274 you've experienced it with [older son] you're kind of like oh shit it's . . . all heading in
275 the same way. And actually it's not and you're able to get through to [younger son]
276 in a way that [older son] not able to get through, interestingly the things that kind of
277 surprise me a little bit are when [younger son] had his school report and his teacher
278 was really lovely, she was great and they did this reading recovery intervention
279 which has really, really helped him and his reading age rose by a year and a half in
280 just a matter of kind of two months and it's really great and that was one to one and
281 it shows the power of one to one support . . . so that really worked. So at . . . every
282 parents evening was . . . he's doing really well, he's a lovely boy and you know the
283 importance is his emotional health with everything going on with [older son],
284 absolutely true. But a little bit funny at the end of the year, I get his school report
285 and it's like he's behind in every single thing apart from . . . PE and . . . I wish I'd
286 known. You know again it's about kind of just be blunt and be honest so . . . I said,

287 'you know what are we going to put into place so he doesn't fall behind further?'

288 and one of the main solutions was for Maths . . . 'have you thought about private

289 tuition?' So nothing . . . to be fair they did in the end and I'm giving them a little bit

290 of time because actually he is engaging really well at the moment and he's still doing

291 reading recovery but . . . I'm slightly on the case. But we ended . . . up falling for the

292 private tuition because . . . he wasn't learning anything in maths. . . a teacher whose

293 a SENCO elsewhere in [local area] in a school with loads of adopted kids and she

294 does it on the side and . . . she's amazing, she's brilliant and he goes there every

295 Saturday morning, but . . . it is something I would have wanted to avoid because I

296 also don't want to put any pressure on him. As it happens she is amazing and she's

297 brilliant and she's lovely but there is something about this area where sadly, I

298 wouldn't pick this school again not because . . .it's the worst school on planet earth,

299 it's not but basically it is a school for high achieving kids and . . . it's all of the chitter

300 chatters about . . . trying to get into [name] Grammar and whose having private

301 tuition to try to get them into [name] Grammar. The parents are like GPs and you

302 know and academics . . . and that's good in a way because they're mixing with kids

303 who have got great language skills but . . . I think if you put them into a school where

304 it's full . . . of average kids and there's also better special needs support then . . . I

305 think you would do even better. But you don't know that really, until you like go on

306 a journey and like he's got loads of mates and he really . . . loves his mates and it's

307 hard, you don't want to cause any more separations in his life you know . . . Other

308 parents as I've said . . . have pulled their kids out and . . . they just saw their kids

309 falling further and further behind and so . . . there's a school in [county] which is . . .

310 quite famous . . . it's not a special needs school, but it . . . it takes special needs kids

311 and they've moved to [county], I mean their dedication is extraordinary. . . but

312 partly they're loaded [laughter] . . . so they can . . . one dad has given up their job

313 and the other dad travels all around the world . . . you know they can do it because

314 they're earning mega bucks but the class sizes are 14 kids to a class.

315 . . . it's very difficult because. . . the adopters groups will talk frequently about how

316 their kid fell further and further behind and the school didn't really have an answer

317 for that. . . I do hear that a lot about about the kid is not able to, the kid isn't

318 necessarily, they're not expressing, there's something about they're confidence in

319 saying I don't understand this, I'm stuck and about keeping your head down and
320 retreating into yourself and not having the confidence, the levels of confidence
321 other children would have.

322 I: so what do you think would, on reflection with [older son] what do you think, do
323 you think anything could have made things better in terms of school?

324 . . . well I think it's interesting there's an article in the guardian the other day . . .
325 they're currently trying to establish a school in Norfolk . . . and I think the closest
326 thing to that is probably the resourced provision class system which is at [school
327 name, neighbouring area] and this is for [name] city council. This is the only one I
328 know and then there's one in [another neighbouring area]. The challenge of it is, and
329 I think they're trying to address it now, I think they kind of learned their lesson,
330 because basically it was just turning into a PRU . . . I think they're being more
331 assertive about who they take and who they don't take. But I think that model . . . it
332 can't be for all adopted kids but I think [older son] should have gone in there to that
333 kind of environment earlier on and if it hadn't had kids who were basically PRU kids .
334 . . I think he would have not had the catastrophic change of perception of his world,
335 because the problem is, I'm convinced that if you don't get the school right and the
336 child disintegrates at school then the impact is felt in the home environment and I
337 reckon adoption disruptions as a result, breakdowns just massively increase. I think
338 if they showed us more empathy then it would have felt less of a lonely existence. . .
339 I think the problem with the lack of information, so you're presented with here's a
340 list of schools . . . and the Ed Psych's . . . we had a great Ed psych, but the system for
341 some reason stops them . . . from naming . . . I don't even necessarily want her to
342 name but it was like this is the kind of model of what you want but . . . they were so
343 reluctant to do that and . . . it felt like that was daft. The system is way too slow, so
344 for [older son], for me applying to the [residential school] took six months, even
345 though we were saying . . . we were worried this is going to disrupt, we were
346 worried this is going into total crisis situation, we're saying safeguarding from [older
347 son] to [younger son], six months! . . . and the EHCP guy was great and he actually
348 asked for a review, because it's an education, health and social care, everything took
349 an age and it was a lot of money but it somehow needs to be a system in which it is
350 much much quicker. They had all the information there you know and . . . god

351 knows these cases are always going to be complex but . . . it wasn't the case that
352 they didn't have all the information . . . it just took forever to get the people in the
353 room to make the decision. And the panel would meet and then one of them would
354 ask a question which was actually already in the information but they're not
355 necessarily come across it and that would delay it again and they would have to wait
356 for the next slot and . . . it went on for six months, and literally it was me . . . driving
357 all the communication with the [residential school] because . . . there was no
358 guarantee he was going to get the place at the [residential school] because they only
359 take a certain number of kids. They only take kids who fit the profile . . . it's about
360 trauma and kids that have been traumatised and attachment disorder and . . . why is
361 it me driving this, it was nuts. There was no one, there's meant to be a virtual head,
362 she was like a chocolate teapot, I mean like she was absolutely hopeless, I gave up,
363 she'd attend the odd meeting, if anything I knew more than she did and . . . nothing
364 happened, you know. . . I honestly think that if you didn't drive it yourself . . . I work
365 in a profession where I have to communicate and I have to get answers and I have to
366 chase things and . . . I . . . don't take no for an answer, you know I have to look at the
367 long game and I have to be constructive and . . . and literally, if I didn't have those
368 skills, and I didn't work part time it would have ended up in disruption and I'm dead
369 proud of myself for doing it. . . but I think a lot of parents would have just gone, I
370 can't cope and it would have disrupted and actually that's the worst thing for him
371 you know . . . I love him to death, you know he's just amazing but he's also incredibly
372 challenging . . . it really makes me annoyed that the system can't cope, I don't
373 understand why there isn't . . . like, 'ok we've got a kid with an attachment disorder
374 so here's the potential check list for the kind of things you should be doing at school'
375 . . . and if this doesn't work out this is what we're going to do next, there's no one,
376 there's no infrastructure around, it's like odd uncoordinated bodies and I suppose
377 the virtual head should be doing that for adopted kids but they just . . . they don't
378 I: no erm, how did you cope through all that then? You must have been incredibly
379 strong.
380 . . . I think . . . I almost compartmentalised it and saw it as like a project, a work
381 project . . . I went into work mode and like you know this is a problem and this is this
382 and it's only when he actually went into school 12 weeks ago that afterwards . . .

383 and still to this day I'm kind of slightly left reeling from it, I mean both of us are
384 which is slightly like what the fuck happened . . . what was that about in terms of. . .
385 having a child where, you know we were really clear about our expectations about
386 we could manage we were very, very, clear and I know there are unknowns but
387 actually it wasn't unknown . . . you know if we wanted to sue them we could . . . I
388 reckon there would be like a really strong case . . . I haven't got the energy and time
389 to do it but if you want to take legal action there's things like . . . we didn't get the
390 paediatrician report until after we had adopted him and stuff like that and . . . the
391 line that you know he's perfect and you know he won't remember anything and . . .
392 all that is just an utter, utter, nonsense now that we know. But we're . . . left reeling
393 from it, reeling from what has happened, desperately trying to . . . make sure, not
394 desperately, but make sure that [younger son] is protected and still that's an
395 ongoing challenge. [older son] comes home in the holidays . . . our lives are just
396 taken up totally with like 24-7 [older son] and your like a full time carer for [older
397 son] and it felt like you were just caring for [older son] . . . there's no understanding
398 from the school like that . . . you don't have the child care that everyone else has
399 because you can't place him in an after school club, you know. Another thing they
400 massively underestimated was . . . they'd mention at the drop of a hat, they'd just
401 say oh yeah so the PRU finished at 2 o'clock and the resourced provision finishes at 2
402 o'clock and your like. . . oh god, I've got a job . . . and the job isn't just . . . about the
403 money, because we're not on the poverty line or anything but the job . . . it was the
404 only time where I was able to switch off. . . I'd already gone part time and . . . no one
405 really quite understanding that . . . just how challenging he was on a day to day
406 basis . . . no one saying how are you? You know, Are you alright . . . actually, that's
407 not strictly true but no one at school saying that . . . and then having to go through
408 every expert you went through, it felt like you're having to go through it all over
409 again . . . you know I lost sight of the number of times- sorry for having to get you to
410 go through this again . . . not joined up. So it has had a real impact on us and . . .
411 we're kind of left reeling but we're starting to . . . breath again. . . and starting a life.
412 And the contrast when [older son] is here and [older son] is not here . . . it's just a
413 different world and I think what is great to hear that at the [residential school]
414 where he is at the moment there is . . . hearing other adoptive parents saying . . .

415 I've gone through worse, it doesn't seem possible but it is the case . . . we have
416 been really lucky compared to what some of the parents have been through like the
417 suspicion they have been under the blame . . . the lack of understanding, the lack of
418 empathy. . . we've been really lucky you know, compared to the majority of them
419 it's shocking.

420 I: and how do you deal with that blame and stay strong and still keep that belief
421 what you are doing?

422 . . . you do have days when you kind of like, 'am I just making a right mess of this?' I
423 suppose I've got a really good support network of friends . . . my family live a bit
424 away from here and my parents are quite old and so they weren't necessarily able
425 and they couldn't really cope with him but I've got four best mates, one of whom
426 has adopted herself. My best mate is amazing you know he's brilliant and then my
427 two other mates and literally when it was getting really tough they were having a
428 rota of coming, each of them would come one weekend, just to kind of support me
429 and support us . . . but then I think . . . I had a goal and a mission and . . . once I knew
430 what the next step was I was able to break it down into bits and, 'ok I know this is
431 what I've got to do next'. When it just feels unmanageable was when you didn't
432 know what the options were and you didn't know what you could do and you didn't
433 have anything else to try and it felt like you kind of hit a brick wall. . . but sadly you
434 just then, have to, it's like playing a card, it's not playing cards but it was literally like
435 you know mentioning safe guarding risks from [older son] to [younger son] and it
436 was talk about adoption disruption. It shouldn't be that way, you're having to say
437 those things to get anyone to move and . . . the 6 months it took to get him into the
438 [residential school], like I am still staggered by that and to be fair they were
439 staggered by it but they're just a little bit like, 'yeah, this is how it is.' But I suppose
440 we stay strong by . . . having a support network, having a plan. . . I think . . .
441 intellectualising his behaviour so you didn't take it personally, really helped, so . . .
442 proper specific insights on why he was doing what he was doing and the best
443 experts really helped. . . generic stuff was . . . 'whatever I've heard that all before',
444 but knowing, this Professor G, he does this because of this and it helps
445 depersonalise it because it is so personal because he's saying the most personal,
446 horrendous things and he's hurting you. The thing I would find most difficult was

447 when he would lash out at his brother but . . . both of us deciding that effectively
448 you are caring for him, you're a carer. I think that really helped and also accepting
449 where he was at, so for a while it was . . . denial and then it just had to be . . . there
450 is something really fundamentally wrong here and accepting that. Because people .
451 . . give you false hope and you know we're going to turn this around and . . .because
452 people say it and then it doesn't happen you stop believing it. You know the
453 [residential school] are really careful how they say it and they don't give you any
454 false hope . . . they'll say . . . we've had examples where they've not made much
455 progress but we've had examples where they've made loads of progress and this is
456 what it looks like. That is what you need; a bit more sophistication you know rather
457 than the kind of oh you know it's going to be fine, it's going to be great
458 I: but it does sound like it's very much about drawing on your own resources,
459 friends, family. . . . skills, knowledge and I don't know maybe, it seems like that
460 support is missing from the professionals around that's the kind of feeling I've got
461 from what you've said. It seems that there is a gap there?
462 . . . there is a gap there and also it's all about personal connections, it shouldn't be
463 that way. If I'm honest, I work for [company] and it's interesting that when I sent an
464 email from my personal account, and I shouldn't send emails from my [company]
465 account because it's a work account . . . and I keep work different, really, really,
466 separate . . . from my . . . personal life. When I'd send an email from a [company]
467 email account, my personal [company] account, as opposed to my home email
468 account, the speed in which it got answered. . . I was never going to use anything
469 connected to [company] but it was like he works for [company] maybe he's like. .
470 .it's nuts it shouldn't be that way, like if I was a single parent, a single parent adopter
471 working full time you'd be absolutely, pardon my language, fucked, it's immoral, it's
472 changed my politics to be honest. . . massively. . . I think the general public would
473 think there is a safety net and . . . there's not . . . there's all these professionals
474 dotted around and there is the EHCP system but . . . there's no one championing,
475 going like, 'right hold on, what are we doing here?'

**Stage 5: Abbreviated transcript coded
Kevin**

. . . they've got the same mum.	
. . . they're 6 and 8 now	
. . . so we adopted them 5 years ago,	
do you want me to tell you our story?	
. . .we adopted them 5 years ago when they were 3 and 1	
. . . they had very different lives,	Different lives Early experience
very different kind of backgrounds	Different backgrounds Early experience
. . . the older child . . . had witnessed extreme trauma. . . has got real attachment issues.	Trauma Attachment Early experience
The younger child was removed at 4 days old from his birth mum	Separation Early experience
and was only with one set of foster carers.	Consistency
The older child was with lots of different foster carers	Inconsistency
with different standards of foster care . . .	Quality
So we've had quite a journey, because right from the offset, I think things have changed now, but right from the offset we were told that they . . . didn't have any attachment issues or behavioural issues	Misinformed
and from day one, clearly not the case.	
So it has been, our older child,	
in fact he's just had an assessment actually	Assessment
where basically the gist of it was, he has very strong disorganised attachment disorder.	Attachment
There's extensive trauma	Trauma
and in effective he's kind of frozen at two years of age,	Trauma
well actually just before two years old where he witnessed a lot of very extreme things and suffered extreme neglect	Early experience
. . . so we felt quite naive because we kind of took the social workers on face value	We didn't know
. . . some of the things they've said now has made us quite cross	Anger
'you know he won't remember, he won't remember the things that have happened to him.'	Misinformed
It's just . . . massively ignorant	ignorant
and actually, two social workers involved in the case both have been moved on really quickly afterwards.	
So we've been on a real journey	
where . . . we found it very challenging at home	Challenging
. . . dealing with temper tantrums . . .	Behaviour
very, very, controlling behaviour,	Behaviour Control
and at first at school. . . in nursery and reception	Positive
it didn't really manifest itself,	No evidence of difficulties

there was no demand	No demand
and he's a bright lad . . .	Individual characteristics
and very charming, gorgeous . . .	Individual characteristics
and then he hit year one	Turning point
and the jump and the deterioration was practically overnight. . .	Deterioration Sudden
I was at work,	
we had a phone call from school	Communication
saying . . . they had to escort all children out of the class . . .	Extreme
he was running around on tops of tables,	Extreme
it was literally overnight,	Sudden
it was almost a catastrophic reaction in his head.	Catastrophic
I think it was. . . always going to happen,	Inevitable
I think it was demand,	Demand
he didn't have an attachment with the teacher,	Attachment
I mean maybe it wasn't always going to happen but I think . . .	Reflection
He's been diagnosed with oppositional defiance disorder, that phraseology . . .	Diagnosis
from that point on things kind of deteriorated.	Turning point Deterioration
He didn't have an attachment with the teacher . . .	Attachment
she wasn't particularly empathetic	Empathy
but also she wasn't very assertive either	Assertiveness
which for him is like having the worst combination for him actually. . .	Individual need
so then it kind of carried on for a long time, well it felt like a long time	Time
where . . . we were communicating lots with school	Communication
and school was communicating lots with us.	Communication
He then switched classes to a better teacher. . .	Change
there was often the honeymoon period,	Honeymoon False sense of security
what we've noticed with education is there's a honeymoon period	Honeymoon False sense of security
and then it kind of disintegrates again.	Disintegrates
So he went into another class in the same cohort in the same year . . .	Change
and things just got worse,	Got worse
hitting, kicking teachers,	Aggressive to teachers
never, never other children	Good with children
so actually very good relationships with other children . . .	Good with children
but it was just incredibly difficult . . . what he was doing at school	Challenging
. . . it was almost completely like in his head something catastrophic has happened	Catastrophic
and his perception of everything was just, it was just kind of like	Perception

he just gave in	Gave up
and clearly you know because he just felt completely insecure	Insecure
. . . and so then . . . school suggested he had a trial period in the PRU	Change PRU
. . . so they could do an assessment with him . . .	Assessment
so he went to a PRU in [nearby area]. .	
and that was obviously a big moment	Significant moment
but we kind of agreed to it because it was a trial	Trial Agreed
and they were going to do an assessment. . .	Assessment
It was hard, I mean it was hard because it was a PRU	Image perception
and all your preconceptions of a PRU	Perception
but also it had got to the stage where every day I was getting a phone call.	impact
Or you know, we were dreading taking him into school,	dread
he was clearly not happy . . .	Not happy
his behaviour would start to deteriorate just before we went out of the door. . .	Deteriorate impact
on the way to school it was just becoming unmanageable.	unmanageable
And it was really affecting the home environment . . .	Impact
and obviously you're always aware of the impact on his younger brother.	impact
So then . . . we went to the PRU . . .	
actually the teacher who ran it was brilliant and amazing.	Positive
I look back on it and . . . what she was good at was just strategies for helping him to learn and to cope,	Strategies Coping skills
there's no kind of underlying . . . tackling of the emotional, mental health issues that he has effectively . . .	No therapeutic intervention
it isn't the right environment because you're mixing with kids who . . . basically are in families where . . . they're going through their own difficulties	Environment Different needs
and . . . it's not the right environment for kids with attachment disorder. . .	Environment Not appropriate
and they kind of recognised that	Understanding
and . . . they had a really good plan for getting him back into [primary school] . . .	Planning
and they worked with the school [name] . . .	Liaising
it was the end of year 1 . . .	
he then went back into [primary school]	Went back
and at first again another honeymoon period	False sense of security
and then he had an EHCP	EHCP
which again had been a very long process to get an EHCP. . .	Time
and the PRU were like he shouldn't be in the PRU	Not appropriate
this isn't the right environment for him . . .	Environment
so [primary school] took him back . . .	Went back
and then it started to slip . . .	Deteriorate
and then it ended up part time schooling . . .	Part time schooling
actually . . . before he went into the PRU he ended up part time	

schooling again	
. . . and I'll come to that in a minute because I feel quite cross about that	Emotional impact
. . . and we were aware that he wasn't happy	Not happy
it was just like he was aggressive every day	Aggressive
and it felt like all that was happening was he was being contained . . .	contained
and then . . . there was an awful lot of communication going on with the school, you know from us	Communication
and we got Ed Psychs involved . . .	Professionals
and then finally they effectively did a part time exclusion	Part time schooling
which happened really quickly and wasn't handled particularly well . . . in my opinion	Time Management
and then we managed to get the place in the PRU	We did it
so . . . they were expecting him to just be home schooled	Home schooled Expectations
and . . . I was like no,	I said no
we need to find, there's an obligation,	Obligation Responsibility
luckily through my own contacts	My contacts
and I'm not being arrogant	
but literally through my relationship with the PRU Headteacher	My relationships
. . . we managed to get him back in the PRU a bit	Went back
and then we heard about this [Name] which is this resourced provision which is a class within a school,	Resourced provision
there is one in [neighbouring local authority]	
and they've just opened one in [another local authority]	
and basically he went in there,	He went there
again a honeymoon period	False sense of security Honeymoon
and that disintegrated sadly	Disintegrated
but interestingly they were saying we can manage it,	We can manage
they didn't want him to leave	Commitment
but . . . nothing is happening here,	Nothing happening
he's not getting an education,	No education
literally all they are doing is containing him . . .	Containment
they were brilliant again absolutely brilliant,	Positive
the woman that runs it, just amazing	Positive
but . . . because an overspill of the PRU, the kind of kids that were going in there	Not appropriate
. . . it's meant to be a halfway house between a PRU and a mainstream school	Compromise
and the idea is you're meant to integrate them into the mainstream school	Integration
and it became clear to us that he's just not going to get back into a mainstream school . . .	Not appropriate
he started to disintegrate	Disintegrate
and you know they managed it really well. . .	Managed well
So we then said to them . . . 'listen we don't think this is working'	Not working

and we had heard through various people about this amazing school,	
which is a residential school called [Name] which is in [area] which is miles away . . .	Residential school
it's like the leading . . . place in the country for . . . kids who've suffered extreme trauma,	Appropriate provision
it's really expensive for the council if I'm honest,	Cost
significant costs for the council	Cost
and we had a big battle	Battle
but we got him into that school . . .	We did it
if I was sending a main message, I would say . . . basically you're just fighting on your own,	Fighting on your own
it's absolutely crazy . . .	Crazy
anyway I'll just finish the narrative	
so basically then he's gone into the [residential school]	Residential school
and partly if I'm honest it came to the point where we weren't able to manage him.	Not able to manage
We were able to manage him at home	Manageable at home
but it was starting to have a detrimental effect on his brother . . .	Impact
we were noticing he was picking up things from him	Influence
and we felt like it wasn't an environment which was fair to his brother	Not fair
and . . . you know all the attention had been on [older son]	Not fair
we just felt . . . [younger son] was going to suffer.	Impact
So [younger son] . . . is in mainstream school	Mainstream
. . . does have wobbles,	Wobbles
I'll come to that	
but he's very different to [older son],	Different
[older son] is at the [residential school]	
and he comes home one in every four weekends and the holidays	Comes back
and . . . that feels manageable for everybody . . .	Manageable
it's obviously really sad that it's ended up like this . . .	emotional impact
again there was a honeymoon period . . .	False sense of security Honeymoon
it's very early days	Early days
so he's only been there in total about 12 weeks now . . .	Time
and the summer holiday was in between	Transition
and he was very angry at the beginning of the summer holidays	anger
and it's like the reality of the situation,	Reality
it just fulfils that 'look what happens, everyone gives up on me, everybody hates me.'	Reinforces perception
. . . I mean he doesn't express it like that	
but that's what he's expressed . . . through kind of play	Communication
. . . and he's given up to some degree,	Given up
his behaviour is challenging there	Challenging
but they are brilliant and amazing	Positive
. . . so that's the story . . .	

it has been a long journey . . .	Long journey
So the process started in the start of year 1	Time
and . . . it finished . . . at the end of year 3.	time
So . . . it took a couple of years . . .	Time
If I'm really honest the point at which . . . things moved. . . is when we said there is a safeguarding risk from [older son] to [younger son].	Turning point Safeguarding
So at that point then things started to happen	Action
and . . . I feel it's quite ridiculous in a way . . .	Ridiculous
but that's how the system works	systems
and the ridiculousness about it is. . . I've just felt that everything is driven by the parents,	Driven by us
absolutely everything . . .	
I'll start with the positive,	
the things . . . which I'm impressed by are . . . if you find the right support then there is some amazing people there	Positive Amazing people
who kind of help and provide guidance. . .	Help and guidance
it's interesting because the [residential school] where he's at there's quite a lot of adopted children there	Not the only one
and there's only . . . about 35 kids in the school	
and I think there's about 12 who are adopted,	
the rest in foster care.	
The twelve kids who are there	
all the parents will talk about how they felt blamed at some point . . .	Blame
all of them in this adoption group,	
it's like sitting there and just hearing the same story we have,	Same story Not alone
that basically schools go through this situation where they blame the parents . . .	Blame
and actually we kind of got past that point quite quickly because we were so engaged	We were involved
but like when I talk engaged I mean like everyday meetings . . .	Frequency Meetings
the level of communication you know; communication book, constant emails, drawing in constant experts,	Communication
direct communication [with] the educational psychologist,	Professionals Communication
direct communication with [older son],	Communication
he went to a professor of child psychology at the university of [city] and [city] hospital	Expertise professional
and he's . . . a national expert	Expertise
and . . . we kind of got him in there. . .	We did it
CAMHS have got a specific adoption person	Specialist
who you know we were in constant contact with them . . .	Communication
but they were amazing because . . . they were empathetic to what we were going through,	Empathy
so sometimes the lack of empathy was extraordinary from the school . . .	Lack of empathy No understanding
you know there are a minority of comments	Judgements

but there was a classic case	
where they kept on expecting us to do home schooling at short notice	Expectations
and literally, I went part time,	I did what I could
[husband] works full time	Commitments
and we were dead flexible	flexible
but my parent are not particularly nearby	No childcare
they're an hour away	Not an option
and they . . . struggle with [older son]	challenging
and [husband's] parents aren't anywhere,	Not an option
his dad is dead and his mum is miles away	Not an option
and sometimes we didn't have the options to always do home school	No choice
but we kept on doing it	Persevered
and I kept on changing my rota,	I tried
it was crazy	Crazy
and it went on for weeks	Time
and then one day I just . . . said to the teaching assistant,	I said
today I'm interviewing people for a job	Commitments responsibilities
and [husband] is interviewing people for a job as well . . .	Commitments responsibilities
I won't be able to home school today	Not an option
and they did this hardball thing	Threat
. . . they looked a bit shocked	Shock
and then the following day the teaching assistant said to me	
I spoke to the head teacher	
and she said that . . . if they couldn't contact you because you were in your interview	expectations
they would have to call social services. . .	threat
I was so gobsmacked because I'd been incredibly constructive you know	shock
and the school had said to me . . . 'you're kind of like perfect parents, you engage and we really like that, thank you.'	
I mean that was a while later	
but at that point . . .	
when I next saw the SENCO,	
I was in a meeting and I really laid it on thick	Communication
and they did apologise	Apology
and I said, 'you know for starters you just try calling social workers,	Empty threat
social services would laugh their heads off' . . .	Trivial
like they're going to have time to deal with . . . how much home schooling have I done . . .	Priorities I have done enough
Actually, we shouldn't be home schooling him you know	We shouldn't be doing it
and I hear that time after time of adopted kids . . .	Common practice
so that was an example of really bad practice,	Bad practice
other bad practice,	
and I'm much better at this with [younger son] now,	

so [younger son] had a bit if a wobble at the beginning of this term	Wobble
. . . transitions, classic, transitions are always difficult for him,	Transitions
and so I said can we have a communication book and things,	Communication
he's doing really well actually,	Positive
I'm really proud of him	Proud
but what I find is often . . . they're so worried about upsetting you	Communication Worry
and partly because . . . they do care,	They do care
that you get this kind of very slightly passive aggressive going around the houses,	Passive aggressive Not getting to the point
so I kind of had to give them permission	I told them
to just say, just be blunt,	Be blunt
just say so this is what has happened today,	Get to the point
give a factual account,	Facts
don't spin it	Be straightforward
don't . . . worry about my feelings	Don't worry
I just need to know where we're at . . .	I need to know
and you know just a very factual account	Facts
and then you can do the positive stuff	Prioritise
but first I need to know what has happened . . .	I need to know
so the only other thing that really wound me up was. . . after he went in the PRU	
. . . when he came back into school,	He went back
he learnt quite a few swear words. . .	Swearing
pardon my language but so, 'fuck off' and 'bitch' and 'cock'.	
Anyhow he used them	
and then . . . there was a meeting between the school, the social worker, the post adoption support worker and I think the PRU were there as well,	Professionals meeting
and after the PRU lady and the social worker told us,	Communication
he's using the word 'cock'	
and they were asking where that has come from	
and . . . you know has that come from the parents?	Blame Accusation
and I was absolutely furious about that	Emotional impact
and actually I think the social worker got bollocked for telling,	
like this is ridiculous . . .	
I think there was a slight element of. . . they'd never experienced anything like it with [older son]	Lack of experience
and his behaviour was really challenging,	Challenging
they didn't know how to manage it,	they didn't know
they felt completely out of their depth.	Out of their depth
The deputy head, lacked any kind of empathy . . .	No empathy
not until the end, actually when he left the school	It was over
and I saw the head teacher	
did the head teacher say I feel for you,	
I so feel for you, we've always felt for you	
and it's like nowhere along the line did you actually say that.	Communication

You know . . . it's just like . . . when he left the school,	
you know endings are obviously a massive thing for [older son],	Endings
he slapped the teacher across the face and quite hard I think	Aggression
and . . . I think she said enough is enough,	She'd had enough
which is fine,	
but . . . I always found it quite difficult to get on with her,	Difficult interaction
I was always cheery and positive and constructive	I tried
but literally there was always a slight air that she was, she reacted sometimes as though she was traumatised	Traumatised
as though she was a little bit like she was a victim	Victim
and nothing kind of explicitly said. . .	A feeling
they were going to temporary expel him,	exclusion
and I said yes because . . . I just thought it's not working	I agreed It's not working
and we just need to move on	Move on
and . . . so I managed to get the place at the PRU	I did it
which was incredible because it was full at the PRU . . .	
but I knew it was a short term,	
and . . . also I had foreseen it	Planned ahead
and had a plan in place	Planned ahead
but they didn't know that necessarily . . .	They didn't know
I kept on having to nag them,	Communication
I emailed them eight times	Communication Frequency
to get them to send him a goodbye card	
and . . . it was all slightly shrouded in mystery as to what had actually happened on the final day	Lack of communication
and I said I . . . need to know what happened,	I need to know
it's a reasonable expectation	Expectation
and I had to nag them to have a meeting	Communication
and I asked them about 5 times	Frequency
and in the end they had the meeting	
and it was . . . that slightly passive aggressive, not wanting to upset me. . .	Passive aggressive
not that they had ever seen me upset because . . . I was always very matter of fact	Matter of fact
and very calm about it,	calm
very kind of lets work it through,	Proactive
what are our next steps . . .	Next steps
and the thing about what really frustrates me is,	Frustration
and I think they learned a lot of lessons from it. . .	They learned a lot
they'd gone through adoption training	Adoption training
midway through their experience with [older son]	Too late
but that was quite staggering because it's [local area] and there are so many adopted children in [local area].	Shocking
So [younger son's] year,	
there's an adopter's group for [primary school]	Adoption support
and there's an adopter's group for [another primary school]	
but . . . there's some stat about there's probably more adopted kids per population than practically anywhere else in the	Prevalence

country. . .	
I mean in [younger son's] class	
. . . a class of 30 there's about 5 adopted kids,	Common
and that's typical in each class.	Typical
He knows of others but he wouldn't necessarily know 5	
and some of the parents are not particularly open about it	
but he knows individuals who are adopted . . .	
it does make a difference to him, I think it makes a difference to him . . .	It makes a difference
you know he'll sometimes talk about his mum	
and missing his mum . . .	
the concept of having a mum. . .	
I think they learnt a lot of lessons,	They learned a lot
I think the key things for me	
are . . . particularly if it's really challenging at home,	Challenging
I think you have to really empathise . . .	Empathy
we've rarely had this	Rare
but I know so many adopted parents have had.	Common
So we've been lucky,	Lucky
but the default position is, the parents must be doing something wrong,	Blame
we were very lucky	Lucky
mainly because we were so in there	We were involved
and we were really constructive	Constructive
. . . totally 100% driven by me	Driven by me
. . . it was like a part time job	It was a job
. . . I mean literally I have about that amount [hand gesture] of emails, over the two years between school, between different experts,	Communication Quantity Dedication
I went on every single adoption training course I bloody could,	I went on training dedication
I read every bloody book I could read,	I read dedication
you know it was insane,	crazy
. . . and I think the thing is the trauma from the child passes through to everyone else,	Trauma Impact
it's like a ripple effect	impact
and I think it passes through the staff at school as well	impact
. . . I think some of them would say he was traumatising them	He was traumatising them
but I think it's more that he wants you to feel his pain	Feel his pain
and feel his trauma	Feel his trauma
and your kind of absorbing that	Absorbing the trauma
and I think they find that very, very difficult.	Difficult
[another primary school] have an adopters group	
and they have experts that come to the adopters group	Experts
and there a really brilliant network	Network
and so I think gradually a lot of adoptive parents are starting to put their kids in [this school].	Moving schools
Depressingly, I know a fair number of adoptive parents who've	Not getting the right

pulled their kids out of [primary school] because they've felt they're not getting the right support.	support
And there is often this thing about, and I see this with [younger son],	
to be fair they are really trying with [younger son] actually,	They are trying
mainly again because I'm [gesture] . . . being all cheery and smiley and not criticising them because I've found that as soon as I've criticised them they're usually defensive	I placated them I was positive School can be defensive
but what I'm finding is that the kids,	
if they haven't got an EHCP which is really difficult to get,	Resources No requirement
so they haven't got a one to one worker. . .	Provision
once they hit Year 2 there's not the same level of teaching assistants . . .	No support
so there's only one teaching assistant for the whole year for the two classes	Provision
and that is a massive thing for the adopted kids.	Impact
So, I think what would tend to happen is they will just tick along . . .	Tick along
and they fall further and further behind.	Fall behind
So from the adopters group I hear that all the time	Common experience
that gradually across the course of the schooling	Gradually
they fall further and further behind	Fall behind
and there's . . . not necessarily any intervention	No intervention
particularly as they get older in the primary school. . .	

. . . I think there's something about them not feel secure and confident	Not secure Not confident
. . . so quite a lot of them will talk about this kind of . . . distraction,	Distraction
a common feeling is this sense of distraction,	Distraction
that there's a sense they're not settled in the classroom . . .	Not settled
So they're not necessarily being mega disruptive,	Not disruptive
they've not necessarily got learning difficulties	No learning difficulties
or anything that merits an EHCP,	No EHCP
but they are distracted	Distracted
and not able to focus in the way the other children do	Not able to focus
and is that something about the environment, the transitions of the day?	Environment Transitions
I'm not sure those things are necessarily broken down . . .	Not considered
and it really depends on the teacher.	Depends on the teacher
I get frustrated . . .	Frustration
so the transition is interesting,	Transition
so every time I . . . start banging on about the transition before the end of the year	Communication

. . . they seem a bit slow on it	Slow
and he has a bit of a wobble at the beginning of the year, [younger son]	wobble
and I've kind of picked this up you know from nursery to reception, reception to year one, year one to year two	Experience
and actually I . . . think you . . . go straight into year 2 and straight in year 1	not considered
and I don't get a sense they phase it enough	Not phased
. . . in terms of the work	
but I also . . . the timetable of how it's going to be different between the year 1 timetable and the year 2 timetable.	Not thought through
I think . . . they might say it differently	My perception
but the hunch I get is that. . .it's like business as usual	Not considered
this is how we're going to do things this year . . .	Set way of doing things
it's overwhelming is the emotion that [younger son] would feel. . .	Overwhelming
it has been really tough . . .	Tough
Well both of us have found it difficult	Difficult
and I suppose because I'm part time in a weird kind of way I have more control over it . . .	Control
I think [husband] finds that a little more difficult because literally he hasn't got the time	Time
to do the same level of interventions . . .	Involvement
there's always a kind of sense that you have to . . . stop yourself	Awareness
. . . with [younger son] because [older son] it ended so sadly for [older son],	Experience
your always hyperaware . . .	Awareness
you're always worried . . .	Worry
you've got to stop yourself over worrying about [younger son] because when he has a wobble it's not the same as anything that has happened to [older son]	It's different
but because you've experienced it with [older son]	Experience
you're kind of like 'oh shit'	
it's . . . all heading in the same way.	Doubt
And actually it's not	
and you're able to get through to [younger son]	You can get through to him
in a way that [older son] not able to get through,	different
interestingly the things that kind of surprise me a little bit are when [younger son] had his school report	I didn't know
and his teacher was really lovely,	Positive
she was great	Positive
and they did this reading recovery intervention	Intervention
which has really, really helped him	Impact
and his reading age rose by a year and a half in just a matter . . . of two months	Impact
and it's really great	Positive
and that was one to one	Support
and it shows the power of one to one support . . .	Impact

so that really worked.	Positive
So at . . . every parents evening was . . . he's doing really well,	Positive
he's a lovely boy	Appreciation
and you know the importance is his emotional health	Understanding
with everything going on with [older son],	Understanding
absolutely true.	Acceptance
But a little bit funny at the end of the year,	
I get his school report and it's like he's behind in every single thing apart from . . . PE	Behind academically
and . . . I wish I'd known.	I didn't know
You know again it's about kind of just be blunt and be honest	Be blunt
so . . . I said, 'you know what are we going to put into place so he doesn't fall behind further?'	Responsibility
and one of the main solutions was for Maths . . .	
'have you thought about private tuition?'	Private tuition Responsibility
So nothing . . .	Nothing
to be fair they did in the end	Eventually
and I'm giving them a little bit of time because actually he is engaging really well at the moment	Time
and he's still doing reading recovery	Intervention
but . . . I'm slightly on the case.	Monitoring
But we ended . . . up falling for the private tuition because . . . he wasn't learning anything in maths	Private tuition
. . . a teacher whose a SENCO elsewhere in [local area] in a school with loads of adopted kids and she does it on the side	Experience
and . . . she's amazing, she's brilliant	Positive
and he goes there every Saturday morning,	Consistency
but . . . it is something I would have wanted to avoid because I also don't want to put any pressure on him.	pressure
As it happens she is amazing and she's brilliant and she's lovely	Positive
but there is something about this area	Demographic
where sadly, I wouldn't pick this school again	Hindsight
not because . . . it's the worst school on planet earth, it's not	
but basically it is a school for high achieving kids	
and . . . it's all of the chitter chatters about . . . trying to get into [name] Grammar	Demographic Priorities
and whose having private tuition to try to get them into [name] Grammar.	Pressure Culture Expectation
The parents are like GPs and you know and academics . . .	Status
and that's good in a way because they're mixing with kids who have got great language skills	Good influence
but . . . I think if you put them into a school where it's full . . . of average kids	Peers
and there's also better special needs support	Better support
then . . . I think you would do even better.	Impact
But you don't know that really, until you like go on a journey	We didn't know
and like he's got loads of mates and he really . . . loves his mates	Friendships
and it's hard, you don't want to cause any more separations in	Early experience

his life you know	
. . . Other parents as I've said . . . have pulled their kids out	
and . . . they just saw their kids falling further and further behind	Falling behind
and so . . . there's a school in [county] which is . . . quite famous	
. . . it's not a special needs school,	
but it . . . it takes special needs kids	
and they've moved to [county],	
I mean their dedication is extraordinary. . .	
but partly they're loaded [laughter] . . . so they can . . .	
one dad has given up their job	
and the other dad travels all around the world . . .	
you know they can do it because they're earning mega bucks	
but the class sizes are 14 kids to a class.	
. . . it's very difficult because. . . the adopters groups will talk frequently about how their kid fell further and further behind	Falling behind
and the school didn't really have an answer for that. . .	They didn't know what to do
I do hear that a lot about the kid is not able to,	Common occurrence
the kid isn't necessarily,	
they're not expressing,	Communicating
there's something about their confidence in saying I don't understand this,	Confidence Understanding
I'm stuck	Stuck
and about keeping your head down	Internalising
and retreating into yourself	Internalising
and not having the confidence,	No confidence
the levels of confidence other children would have.	different

. . . well I think it's interesting there's an article in the guardian the other day	
. . . they're currently trying to establish a school in Norfolk	
. . . and I think the closest thing to that is probably the resourced provision class system	
which is at [school name, neighbouring area] and this is for [name] city council.	
This is the only one I know	
and then there's one in [another neighbouring area].	
The challenge of it is, and I think they're trying to address it now,	Challenge
I think they kind of learned their lesson, because basically it was just turning into a PRU . . .	They know now
I think they're being more assertive about who they take and who they don't take.	Control
But I think that model . . . it can't be for all adopted kids	Not all adopted kids
but I think [older son] should have gone in there to that kind of environment earlier on	Hindsight
and if it hadn't had kids who were basically PRU kids . . .	
I think he would have not had the catastrophic change of perception of his world, because the problem is, I'm convinced that if you don't get the school right	Impact

and the child disintegrates at school	Disintegrates
then the impact is felt in the home environment	Impact at home
and I reckon adoption disruptions as a result,	Adoption disruption Impact
breakdowns just massively increase.	More breakdowns
I think if they showed us more empathy then it would have felt less of a lonely existence. . .	Empathy
I think the problem with the lack of information,	Lack of information
so you're presented with here's a list of schools	Basic information
. . . and the Ed Psych's . . . we had a great Ed psych,	Positive Professionals
but the system for some reason stops them . . . from naming . . .	Systems Not able to help
I don't even necessarily want her to name but it was like this is the kind of model of what you want	Not able to help
but . . . they were so reluctant to do that	Reluctant
and . . . it felt like that was daft.	
The system is way too slow,	Systems Time
so for [older son], for me applying to the [residential school] took six months,	Time
even though we were saying . . . we were worried this is going to disrupt,	Risk
we were worried this is going into total crisis situation,	Risk
we're saying safeguarding from [older son] to [younger son], six months! . . .	Risk
and the EHCP guy was great	Positive Professionals
and he actually asked for a review, because it's an education, health and social care,	Action
everything took an age	Time
and it was a lot of money	Cost
but it somehow needs to be a system in which it is much, much, quicker.	System Time
They had all the information there you know	Information
and . . . god knows these cases are always going to be complex	Complex
but . . . it wasn't the case that they didn't have all the information	They had all the information
. . . it just took forever to get the people in the room to make the decision.	Time Decisions Process
And the panel would meet	Process
and then one of them would ask a question which was actually already in the information	Process
but they've not necessarily come across it	Unaware
and that would delay it again	Time Delay
and they would have to wait for the next slot	Waiting
and . . . it went on for six months,	Time
and literally it was me	I did it

. . . driving all the communication	I communicated
with the [residential school] because . . . there was no guarantee he was going to get the place at the [residential school] because they only take a certain number of kids.	No guarantee Requirements
They only take kids who fit the profile . . .	requirements
it's about trauma and kids that have been traumatised and attachment disorder	Appropriate provision
and . . . why is it me driving this, it was nuts.	I did it
There was no one,	No support
there's meant to be a virtual head, she was like a chocolate teapot,	No support
I mean like she was absolutely hopeless,	Negative perception
I gave up,	I gave up
she'd attend the odd meeting,	Presence
if anything I knew more than she did	Not enough knowledge
and . . . nothing happened,	No action
you know. . . I honestly think that if you didn't drive it yourself	you have to do it yourself
. . . I work in a profession where I have to communicate	Professional Skills
and I have to get answers	Professional Skills responsibility
and I have to chase things	Professional Skills responsibility
and . . . I . . . don't take no for an answer,	Professional skills expectations
you know I have to look at the long game	Experience Expectations
and I have to be constructive	Professional skills experience
. . . and literally, if I didn't have those skills, and I didn't work part time	A requirement
it would have ended up in disruption	Impact Adoption disruption
and I'm dead proud of myself for doing it	Emotional impact
. . . but I think a lot of parents would have just gone, I can't cope	Overwhelming
and it would have disrupted	Adoption disruption
and actually that's the worst thing for him you know . . .	Not appropriate
I love him to death, you know he's just amazing	Attachment love
but he's also incredibly challenging . . .	Challenging
it really makes me annoyed that the system can't cope,	System
I don't understand why there isn't . . . like, 'ok we've got a kid with an attachment disorder so here's the potential check list for the kind of things you should be doing at school' . . .	System Process
and if this doesn't work out this is what we're going to do next,	Options
there's no one,	No support
there's no infrastructure around,	No structure
it's like odd uncoordinated bodies	Uncoordinated

and I suppose the virtual head should be doing that for adopted kids but they just . . . they don't	No support
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. . . I think . . . I almost compartmentalised it	Work
and saw it as like a project, a work project . . .	Work
I went into work mode	Work mode
and like you know this is a problem and this is this	
and it's only when he actually went into school 12 weeks ago	
that afterwards . . . and still to this day I'm kind of slightly left reeling from it,	Left reeling from it impact
I mean both of us are which is slightly like what the fuck happened	Impact
. . . what was that about	Impact
in terms of. . . having a child where, you know we were really clear about our expectations	We were clear Expectations
about [what] we could manage	Abilities
we were very, very, clear	Very clear
and I know there are unknowns but actually it wasn't unknown . . .	misinformed
you know if we wanted to sue them we could . . .	
I reckon there would be like a really strong case . . .	
I haven't got the energy and time to do it	No energy No time
but if you want to take legal action	It's a possibility
there's things like . . . we didn't get the paediatrician report until after we had adopted him	Information was missing
and stuff like that	
and . . . the line that you know he's perfect	Misrepresentation
and you know he won't remember anything	Misinformed
and . . . all that is just an utter, utter, nonsense now that we know.	We know now
But we're . . . left reeling from it,	Impact Left reeling
reeling from what has happened,	Impact
desperately trying to . . . make sure, not desperately, but make sure that [younger son] is protected	Protecting son
and still that's an ongoing challenge.	Challenge
[older son] comes home in the holidays. . . our lives are just taken up totally with like 24-7 [older son]	Commitment Time Impact Effort
and your like a full time carer for [older son] and it felt like you were just caring for [older son] . . .	Carer
there's no understanding from the school like that . . .	No understanding
you don't have the child care that everyone else has because you can't place him in an after school club, you know.	No childcare
Another thing they massively underestimated	No understanding
was . . . they'd mention at the drop of a hat, they'd just say oh yeah so the PRU finished at 2 o'clock and the resourced	Expectations

provision finishes at 2 o'clock	
and your like. . . oh god, I've got a job	Commitments Responsibilities
. . . and the job isn't just . . . about the money, because we're not on the poverty line or anything	Not about money
but the job . . . it was the only time where I was able to switch off. . .	Respite
I'd already gone part time	I tried
and . . . no one really quite understanding that	No understanding
. . . just how challenging he was on a day to day basis	Challenging every day
. . . no one saying how are you?	No empathy
You know, Are you alright? . . .	No empathy No support
actually, that's not strictly true	
but no one at school saying that . . .	
and then having to go through every expert you went through,	Repetitive Retelling
it felt like you're having to go through it all over again . . .	Repetitive Retelling
you know I lost sight of the number of times- sorry for having to get you to go through this again	
. . . not joined up.	Not joined up
So it has had a real impact on us	Impact
and . . . we're kind of left reeling	Impact Left reeling
but we're starting to . . . breath again. . . and starting a life.	Starting again
And the contrast when [older son] is here and [older son] is not here. . . it's just a different world	Impact different
and I think what is great to hear	
that at the [residential school] where he is at the moment	
. . . hearing other adoptive parents saying . . . I've gone through worse,	Support from adoptive parents
it doesn't seem possible but it is the case . . .	
we have been really lucky compared to what some of the parents have been through	Lucky
like the suspicion they have been under, the blame . . .	Blame
the lack of understanding,	No understanding
the lack of empathy. . .	No empathy
we've been really lucky you know, compared to the majority of them it's shocking.	Lucky

. . . you do have days when you kind of like, 'am I just making a right mess of this?'	Doubt
I suppose I've got a really good support network of friends . . .	Good support network
my family live a bit away from here	
and my parents are quite old and so they weren't necessarily able	
and they couldn't really cope with him	

but I've got four best mates, one of whom has adopted herself.	
My best mate is amazing you know he's brilliant and then my two other mates	
and literally when it was getting really tough they were having a rota of coming,	
each of them would come one weekend,	
just to kind of support me and support us	
. . . but then I think . . . I had a goal and a mission	Goal Mission
and . . . once I knew what the next step was I was able to break it down into bits	Next steps
and, 'ok I know this is what I've got to do next'.	Break it down
When it just feels unmanageable was when you didn't know what the options were	Don't know Unmanageable
and you didn't know what you could do	Didn't know
and you didn't have anything else to try	No options
and it felt like you kind of hit a brick wall. . .	No options
but sadly you just then, have to, it's like playing a card, it's not playing cards	
but it was literally like you know mentioning safe guarding risks from [older son] to [younger son]	Desperate measures Safeguarding
and it was talk about adoption disruption.	Desperate measures Adoption disruption
It shouldn't be that way,	
you're having to say those things to get anyone to move	Action Impact
and . . . the 6 months it took to get him into the [residential school],	Time
like I am still staggered by that	Unbelievable
and to be fair they were staggered by it	
but they're just a little bit like, 'yeah, this is how it is.'	Acceptance
But I suppose we stay strong by . . . having a support network, having a plan. . .	Staying strong
I think . . . intellectualising his behaviour	Understanding
so you didn't take it personally, really helped,	
so . . . proper specific insights on why he was doing what he was doing	Insight
and the best experts really helped. . .	Experts
generic stuff was . . . 'whatever I've heard that all before',	We know
but knowing, this Professor G, he does this because of this	
and it helps depersonalise it because it is so personal because he's saying the most personal, horrendous things and he's hurting you.	Depersonalise it It hurts
The thing I would find most difficult was when he would lash out at his brother	Difficult impact
but . . . both of us deciding that effectively you are caring for him, you're a carer.	Acceptance Carer
I think that really helped	Helpful
and also accepting where he was at,	Acceptance
so for a while it was . . . denial	Denial

and then it just had to be . . . there is something really fundamentally wrong here and accepting that.	Acceptance
Because people . . . give you false hope and you know we're going to turn this around and . . . because people say it and then it doesn't happen you stop believing it.	False hope trust
You know the [residential school] are really careful how they say it	Understanding Careful consideration
and they don't give you any false hope . . .	False hope
they'll say . . . we've had examples where they've not made much progress	Being open Reality
but we've had examples where they've made loads of progress	Managing expectations
and this is what it looks like.	
That is what you need; a bit more sophistication	
you know rather than the kind of oh you know it's going to be fine, it's going to be great	

. . . there is a gap there	
and also it's all about personal connections,	Personal connections influence
it shouldn't be that way.	
If I'm honest, I work for [company]	status
and it's interesting that when I sent an email from my personal account,	influence
and I shouldn't send emails from my [company] account because it's a work account	
. . . and I keep work different, really, really, separate . . . from my . . . personal life.	
When I'd send an email from a [company] email account, my personal [company] account,	
as opposed to my home email account,	
the speed in which it got answered. . .	Impact
I was never going to use anything connected to [company]	
but it was like he works for [company]	
. . . it's nuts it shouldn't be that way,	Inequality Unfair advantage
like if I was a single parent, a single parent adopter working full time you'd be absolutely, pardon my language, fucked,	Disadvantaged
it's immoral, it's changed my politics to be honest. . . massively. . .	Immoral Political
I think the general public would think there is a safety net	No safety net Perception
and . . . there's not . . . there's all these professionals dotted around	Uncoordinated professionals
and there is the EHCP system	systems
but . . . there's no one championing, going like, 'right hold on, what are we doing here?'	No one coordinating

Interview

Stage 1: Transcription

Anna

I = interviewer

P3 = participant 3

I: So you've just adopted [son] then?

P3: four years ago

I: but he's the only one?

P3: He's the only one, yeah

I: Yeah, right erm so could you tell me a little bit about the experience of when he first arrived and the adoption process

P3: Erm

I: and how that was

P3: We didn't have any problems in the adoption process.

I: Oh Ok

P3: So we did it quite quickly, we were approved and he was identified for us about 3 months later

I: Oh wow that's good

P3: he was the first child that we thought about, so then it went quite smoothly erm he was from [northwest town] and we lived in [south east] so we came up to [northwest town] and spent a week there

I: right

P3: which was quite intense but the foster carers were very nice and then she brought him up to [south east] for a week

I: wow

P3: and it seemed to go really well erm we're still in touch with her, we got on fine with her she's a lovely person erm we thought [son] was alright. For the first 3 months he seemed fine but then he started to get really aggressive

I: Oh right, ok.

P3: I think he was probably in shock for the first 3 months and we didn't know, we thought he was alright

I: Yeah

P3: and he really wasn't.

I: Orr

P3: I think, so since then we've had a lot of problems with aggression and err but then that settled probably after about 10 months, I think he was just angry with us because we took him away, he didn't understand, then he gradually got better with us, he was ok and then he started nursery and did really well in nursery, he was with us for 8 or 9 months, so we had 8 or 9 months with just him at home and my partner was off as well, so both of us were off so we gave him as good a start as we could really and then when he went to nursery he was only part time and he did ok, he was fine, really good and he made friends and got on well with the teachers. There was about 5 incidents of him being aggressive and quite badly aggressive like picking up a chair and threatening the teacher with it, things that they were shocked by, you know more than other kids but only about 5 times in a year but we were a little bit worried but not too bad. And then when he went to reception it was just horrific

I: things escalated?

P3: a million times worse, awful, horrendous

I: Oh gosh

P3: yeah within days, he just couldn't cope with it

I: What did that look like, what kind of

P3: he started off, after 3 days the teachers said we're really worried because he won't follow instructions,

I: right

P3: he won't do what we tell him, he'll just go off and do his own thing, she just noticed that and then he started to be really aggressive to her and the teaching assistants and then he started to be aggressive to the other children and just, very quickly within a few weeks it was just totally unmanageable, he just spent all day being aggressive

I: Right ok, and how was he at home at that time?

P3: he was alright, he was fine

I: when he came home?

P3: yeah we wouldn't have known anything was happening except we were told by the teachers, he was alright with us

I: Right, ok

P3: but then it got worse and worse and worse, you know trashing classes, biting, kicking. You know they couldn't do anything with him so

I: Were you contacted quite a lot then?

P3: like every day, yeah, yeah, weekly meetings with the head, they kept you know trying to think of ways and we had so many assessments, we had erm, at the beginning, from October we knew he wasn't going to cope actually, so there were lots of things we tried to do, we said can we take him out of reception and start again next year because he's summer born, we should have done that at the start, ask for a deferment but I didn't know he was going to struggle, thinking back I should have definitely done it because he wasn't able to, we hadn't realised. They said no to that and then we said can he have a full time teaching assistant with him you know, I'm afraid we don't have funding for that

I: right

P3: they had different bits of people coming in to help him but no one person, we just needed more support I think in a class of 30 he was just really scared obviously

I: so you felt that he was scared in that situation?

P3: yeah definitely, really terrified I think, that came out in aggression. In nursery there's a lot more adults and a lot less children

I: Right

P3: it was quieter

I: That was the difference

P3: school was you know, 30 kids, 1 teacher and a teaching assistant that was between, two classes actually

I: right

P3: so it was just too much, he was just really scared

I: what do you think scared him about that situation?

P3: he just needs a lot of adult attention, now we know, we didn't know he just needs adults looking after him all the time otherwise he just feels frightened

I: Yeah, ok.

P3: he doesn't like too many children around him, he needs a lot of adult attention, he just feels like he disappears, you know he's not safe, nobody's caring for him enough. So he had all sorts of people, he had educational psychologist, clinical

psychologist, specialist behavioural team, he was the youngest they'd ever worked with, they got a specialist worker in you know, the SENCO obviously did nothing, she didn't know what to do, she didn't suggest anything

I: right

P3: referred to CAMHS, they rejected us at first, we eventually got an assessment

I: ok

P3: educational psychology rejected us at first, each was saying we should have the other. So CAMHS were saying the EP should see him, they were saying no it was a CAMHS problem, it lasted for months, honestly

I: really?

P3: 6 months you know

I: toing and froing

P3: Yeah, we got an assessment but it was towards the end of the year and the specialist behaviour team started, you know I think midway through the year towards the end a bit more towards the end. SO all these things came in but it was way too late so I think by then he got in such a bad pattern of behaviour, there was nothing you could do with him.

I: so do you feel if people had come in earlier

P3: it's possible, I don't know but you know, it's possible, maybe nothing would have worked. I don't know but by then it was definitely too late

I: right

P3: and they did other things you know like let him spend time in nursery a little bit, it wasn't consistent I think, I think they didn't have enough time to really deal with him so they agreed to do lots of things and let him be in nursery for part of each day, you know and stuff like that but it didn't always happen, it happened occasionally. They were just overwhelmed, they couldn't do it and they didn't have funding to get him extra support. So by January, he did have his own one to one teacher but four months in I think even that was a bit too late but he did and we thought that might help and it did for a couple of week help but no, he started being really aggressive to her and she really hated him actually in the end

I: Orr

P3: you could tell she really hated him, I'm not sure she was the right person

I: really and what did you think about that at the time?

P3: it just wasn't going to work. And then they got, they reduced his hours to 1 hour a day for ages and that seemed ok but only because he was there for 1 hour, he was easier to manage and then he was aggressive in an hour

I: right

P3: but they started increasing it and they decreased it, you know it was just up and down. It was all chaos, nobody knew what to do so in the end they put him on part time from about 9 months from 1 hour to 2 hours to 3 and then they got stuck on 3 hours forever. I was trying to work, I had a job then because I'd gone back to work and I kept being called home from work every day, almost everyday, sometimes it was like 20 past 9 in the morning and I'd be on the way to work they phone to say you have to pick him up now. So I had to give up work. . . it was, just the whole thing was awful, really terrible

I: It sounds really challenging

P3: he got so stressed and the whole year you could see he got really bad dandruff and his lips were bleeding all the time with stress and . . .

I: Oh

P3: it was awful, really awful but we kept going and going because they kept saying it might get better, they wanted these assessments done, it took all year to get the assessments done because we wanted and EHCP

I: Yeah

P3: but actually at the end of the year things had not got any better at all, they wouldn't let us go back, we wanted him to maybe repeat reception but they wouldn't let us do that so we couldn't do anything else, we couldn't send him back to school in year 1 so we've kept him out since then.

I: so he completed the full reception year

P3: he just about held on, it was awful but he did just finish it at the same time as everyone else instead of taking him out, we didn't want him to know we were taking him out because of his behaviour because we thought that might

I: Yeah

P3: not be good for him to know that if he kicks off you know he can, so he never knew it was because of that, we just. . . so he finished at the same time as his friends

so he noticed a bit less. So since then we've just said that school is too difficult for you, we'll go back when you're older and it's a bit easier for you and you need more time at home so that was that.

I: So have you done two years home-schooling?

P3: it's our second year home-schooling yeah

I: and how's that going?

P3: really good, yeah

I: right ok

P3: so we got an EHCP, we made the school apply for it just before the end

I: oh good

P3: and then we spent the next 10 months trying to get it at home and they finally gave it to us just before we moved

I: right ok

P3: so we got an EHCP because we wanted to try again, that was the plan to take a year out and try again but with all the support at the beginning but then he was doing so well we just couldn't face going back and we were supposed to go back September next year and we decided not to go back then either, maybe the one after [laughter] it keeps getting extended [laughter]

I: at least it's still a possibility but

P3: it's a possibility. . . I don't know, I think me and my partner disagree a little bit because I think he's doing so well I'd like to keep him out because I think what ever we do I think school will be a disaster again and I can't face it. . . it's just so damaging for him.

I: has that aggression subsided now?

P3: yeah, not entirely still when he is stressed it happens with other children, so it's not been perfect with home education, there's still problems but there much more manageable because I'm there all the time

I: yeah

P3: so I can step in if I see something happening I can remove him you know and in school he was uncontrollable but outside, people think he's maybe a bit rough sometimes, some of the other kids think he's a bit rough erm but he doesn't really stand out that much, only a little bit and in school he was just off the scale but

outside he's in social groups, we do a lot of activities everyday. Home education groups, gymnastics and drama groups and like all sorts of things and there he manages ok, we've had problems but

I: so he still sees quite a group of young people

P3: we do everyday, yeah

I: right

P3: so he gets all his socialising and he's made brilliant friends erm but the groups are smaller, theres usually only 6, 7, 8 maybe 12 children so they're manageable and I'm there in the background so I can see if he's getting stressed and if I need to I'll step in and take him out until he's calmed down and put him back in, that's what he needs, he does get stressed, he just needs somebody there with him, yeah, get him out quickly, recognise the triggers and stuff because it does happen very quick but I know the kinds of things that will set him off, things like having to follow instructions erm which is bad for school obviously so the groups that he has to do what he's told all the time he finds really hard so like gymnastics they tell him how to, I don't know if you know but they have to do line work and he's really struggled with that, he just flops on the floor and refuses to do anything, gets really stressed and at the beginning I had to take him out a few times but now the teachers got to know him, he's got to know the teacher and he still flops around you know falls on the ground when he doesn't want to do things but actually he does it in quite good humour and he's not been aggressive, you know he's fine

I: he's managing it differently?

P3: yeah but it took about 10 weeks before he started relaxing

I: and what do you think helped in that 10 weeks?

P3: knowing what to expect, getting to know everybody, the teacher knowing him but you know just took a long time I think. But it was a very controlled group, so it was different with a school class of 30, you know it's 12 kids a lot of them are quite a bit older, more mature and he's got, you know some of them are younger, I think the age mix helps him as well, you get a lot of that in home education groups, so he's got older kids to look after him and he's got younger ones that he can look after, you know he responds to that well rather than everyone being the same age and competing with each other, which I think doesn't suit him.

I: right, ok

P3: just people his own age and lots of them

I: Yeah

P3: yeah. . .

I: So you mentioned about him, not feeling safe and maybe that was why. . .

P3: Oh definitely that's why, yeah,

I: . . . he was aggressive

P3: Mmm

I: and so it was something to do with, the number of children

P3: definitely the number of children

I: not enough staff

P3: he needs more adult attention, yeah he needs a lot to feel safe which I didn't realise but he does

I: in terms of the different teaching, you can compare them really as to what is provided at mainstream primary school and what's different about home schooling, is it just about the relationships and the people around him or

P3: Ermm its smaller groups, I'm there. In home education groups they are less strict so if he doesn't want to do something they wont usually force him to do it

I: Right ok

P3: they'll either ignore him or let me take him out. But with school there's a lot more pressure to do what he was told. He's got a lot of control issues like a lot of adopted kids, I think ive seen it a lot, they don't like being controlled by other people, they need to be in control so they do like always doing what theyre told. So if stressed the default will be no I'm not doing it. He does that a lot.

I: So what sense do you make of that then, is it because he's adopted or because of his early experiences?

P3: Yeah well being adopted is part of his experience. I think he life was so out of control for a few years, he had four different families and he was only 2 years 9 months but you know just that a part from anything else, you know when he was still at home a lot of fighting and arguing, you know all of his experience is pretty uncontrollable and he didn't know what was going to happen to him next. And he loved his foster carers, he was there, 21 months he was there, I think he was just

getting on alright. If he had stayed there he probably would have been alright, it was just that final move that really did him in I think

I: right. . . and how do you feel about all that and where he is now

P3: ermm like he's being great now, he's brilliant. He's never been so happy, you can just see, just this year actually, this last six months he's done brilliantly. Finally he's just relaxed and he really enjoys what he does, he's got friends, he feels quite good about himself, you know he always felt awful, because everybody, he knew he was a bad one

I: Aww. . . do you think that's how school saw him

P3: Yeah and all the other kids, you know in the playground all the kids would be saying oh that's the bad one. Which I don't blame them because he was just you know, they were scared of him. But he doesn't get that now, he's got lots of friends

I: oh good. . . .

P3: so yeah.

I: do you want a tissue?

P3: no, no, no

I: Are you sure? Sorry. . . sounds like it's been a really tough time.

P3: Schoolwise but I's been alright since then.

I: Does he talk about school, does he remember?

P3: He does, he only ever talks about the lunches, he used to like the lunches [laughter] he still talks about that. When he was first taken out, he talked a lot about it, said he wanted to go back which surprised us. He constantly I wanna go back, when can I go back I miss my friends.

I: So it was about. . .

P3: he didn't have any friends, not really, a few, not good, he didn't, cos of his behaviour he wasn't able to form friendships. You know I think he felt a sense of loss, he felt he was missing out, he did feel a sense of loss about leaving school but we knew it was the right thing definitely. We knew if he went back, it would be no good. But now he doesn't want to go back to school anymore, because he's happy, really happy

I: That's good

P3: and so yeah, so we do talk about him going back to school, and he says things like I want to go back to school but I want it to be a school where I'm the only child, he says it all the time. So I think he knows he can't cope if there are too many children around, that's what he says. And when he was in school he used to say there was too many children, he says that himself that's what it is.

I: That's good that he's aware of that, that's really good he's aware of that.

P3: You know I say there are no schools like that, if you go to school there will be a lot of other children. He doesn't want to go. So he says he'll go if he knows someone else in the class, so he'll say can I go to school with one of my friends. We'll have to see.

I: You mentioned about you and your partner maybe not seeing eye to eye on going back to school.

P3: I want him to stay out until. . . I think because I've been doing all of it and I've met loads of people who just do it like that erm they just keep the kids out until they're 14 or if they want to go to college, they can go to college. So it's become really normal to me when I see it all around me and I see that the kids are doing quite well. But *partner* has been quite separated from it.

I: Does she work full time?

P3: She works full time so I think it's not become so normalised for her I think, she just can't imagine what it will be like to have him at home when he's older, she thinks it would be too much trying to teach him. . . she just can't imagine it but I've seen other people do it so I think it would be alright actually but she wants him to go back to school

I: Mmm

P3: But we both agree not until, not this September but the one after

I: right

P3: so that's where we are [laughter] we're stretching it out [laughter] but you know it's hard for her because she's cut off from it all and I think in a school she'd understand it more and would pick him up and be more involved but here it's a separate life, this way it's very separate, she doesn't know the people I know, she doesn't see what we do and I think she feel quite left out I think and also the

financial, I've had to give up work and we've had to move here because we couldn't afford to live in London anymore, it caused us a lot of problems.

I: So it's had a massive, the difficulties he was having in reception has had a massive impact on your family life, where you live and your job.

P3: Huge! Everything has changed

I: That's quite brave to give all that up

P3: we didn't have the option

I: No

P3: so that's, he couldn't go back to school, even if he went back to school I can't work, everybody says it would have to be really reduced hours

I: Ok

P3: The educational psychologist said the other day, he recommended if he went back he'd do an hour a day you know if that took a year, then you know . . . it would have to be a year, so you know that's the worst of both worlds, that's an hour a day I'm tied to the school, I'd have to do what they tell me it's involving lots of professionals you know its very stressful, meetings and people that don't understand. This way I'm in control of it.

I: Yeah

P3: so if he was at school for an hour a day, he'd still be getting behind with his work, I'd be controlled by them you know, I wouldn't be able to do what I wanted and when he was doing part time before he would be stressed after school, I couldn't do work with him after school because he wouldn't be, you know so that just feels like a horrible option to me. So I won't be able to work anyway if he was at school

I: mmm

P3: We can't use after school clubs because he can't really be looked after by other people very easily. Sometimes, my parents for a short time but you know I can't just ask friends to pick him up because he kicks off, I don't let him go to other kids houses without me being there because occasionally, not very often there would be an incident and I don't want other parents having to deal with it

I: Yeah

P3: I want to be there and get him out quick

I: Yeah

P3: I don't know if I'll be able to work again either way so I'd rather, what's the incentive to go to school? Not much.

I: Yeah, difficult

P3: I don't see what he would gain from being at school, I really don't

I: No, I can see that an hour a day, what is that worth, that hour a day when

P3: I think slowly it will acclimatise him but I just don't think it would work, maybe it would work, I don't know, I don't know

I: You mentioned about now feeling more in control of things. When he was in reception and nursery did you feel out of control?

P3: I was, everybody was

I: Ok

P3: everybody was out of control

I: So nobody was taking control?

P3: nobody knew what to do

I: Ok

P3: He was out of control, I couldn't control it because I wasn't there. I felt like it was my responsibility but I wasn't there you know and they looked to me like what shall we do and I was just like, I don't know, he's not like this at home, so I didn't know. I wanted them to tell me what to do or you know I thought they'd know what to do but they didn't.

I: And why do you think that is? Was it just that particular school and they didn't have experience

P3: I don't know, that's what every says but I don't think so, no. Maybe there are better schools definitely, it probably wasn't the best school but it wasn't the worst, I don't know, I think any school would have really struggled with him definitely, any school unless it was a class of 12 with an extra teaching assistant you know but you'd have to pay for private school for that would you. And even that I don't know, they have their small classes, they probably do. I think that's what he might cope with, that kind of, or a special school would be alright but then how do we get hold of a special school, it's almost impossible isn't it, he's not got a diagnosis of anything, it would take years to get hold of one and the process would be so

horrible because he would have to fail again at school you know, he's have to go through all that. But he'd be alright in a special school but is he better at being home educated, probably, at a special school the other kids wouldn't be the same as him, they'd be there for different reasons. Special school for adopted kids, yes they do exist but they're not round here are they

I: no

P3: there's one in Reading isn't there but what choice do we have?

I: And is that because they'd understand. . . 21.15

P3: They'd understand yeah and there'd be other kids with similar issues

I: Yeah, they'd have that experience

P3: I'm sure he would be alright in that kind of school

I: right ok. . . so is it then, I'm just thinking about schools and what they could do better, erm is it something about them understanding more and having more knowledge?

P3: I think they should have attachment training, that school didn't until four months in and even then just one teacher going on it and she was expected to, it was just, there were too many staff involved. In the end his teacher got sent off for a day, that's fine a day but then she was expected to tell everyone else what she'd learned. I don't know how well that works, that trickle down training, maybe it does work, it's what people do now send one on training.

I: It depends what it is and how it's shared. . . You mentioned that he did well at nursery,

P3: Yeah

I: What do you think the difference was

P3: smaller group, more adults but also he wasn't told what to do all day. He can do a bit of following instructions but when its constantly all day. So what went wrong I think the things they should have changed from the beginning. He had a very strict teacher who shouted a lot, that's especially a big no no because when you shout at him he gets into his no im not and that makes him more aggressive, he gets scared so starts fighting. So she shouted a lot, she was known for shouting, I didn't know that until it was too late, she actually left because a lot of parents complained about her way before the end. It wasn't just *son* but she was the worse teacher for him

probably erm and they asked me in to shadow for a few days in order to support him so I saw a lot of things that were happening that I didn't know, there was a time out chair in the room, the whole school did that, but I didn't know. There was a chair that naughty children could sit on in front of everyone and used, in front of me she did this, I don't know what it was like when I wasn't there. He wouldn't take his gloves off so when they came in they had to take their coats and gloves off and he wanted to keep his gloves on and she, you know he wouldn't take them off. It was a little thing, why didn't she just ignore it and let him keep his gloves on if it makes him feel better but he had to go on the time out chair for that, not taking his gloves off and then they all had to say good morning one by one when she did the register and er he didn't say anything. He didn't used to like saying hello in front of people or anything, so he was silent, so she put him on the time out chair for that and that was just non-violent things. So that wasn't great, it made him much worse. So she was constantly making him do lots of things, there was no leeway for her letting him relax and it was not just leave him, leave his gloves, if he doesn't say anything just let him be quiet.

I: Did they take any of that on board?

P3: the Headteacher did. . . the teacher didn't. . . I think the Headteacher had words with her I think but she wouldn't change anything so then they moved his class to another teacher who he'd had in nursery and had moved to year 1 which I thought brilliant that will be the answer, but no.

I: Right ok

P3: a couple of weeks he did ok and then, it was like the same again, but I don't know whether because of his bad start it just carried on, if he'd started with a different teacher from the beginning, maybe. I don't know, I think his issues are so deep routed actually I don't think any school would have been good but there could have been better schools. Yeah the teachers thought he was just being naughty on purpose, definitely.

I: So that's why she was. . .

P3: she was trying to break his will, I think she thought, impose her authority he'd start listening, it works for some other kids I'm sure but

I: he was only little

P3: I know he was only four and a half, it's horrible thinking about it,

I: So I suppose it's having that perception of where that behaviour is coming from and because she thought he was just being naughty she was just going to use a punishment

P3: so had a zero tolerance thing for him and other boys I heard, or just everyone I suppose, that's how she ran her classes, yeah there's no understanding about you know, refusal to follow instructions might be because he's anxious. It's a control issue thing, let him have control over a few things, like keeping his gloves on, that would really have helped but nobody understood that I think in the whole school.

I: and where have you got your understanding from?

P3: just reading I think, we've had lots of assessments, I do feel like I understand him and general adoption issues really well now erm we had a really good social worker from our adoption agency we had a psychology assessment, she was really helpful. Educational psychologist with the school was absolutely useless I must say

I: really

P3: she had nothing to add, she just had no suggestions, the report was just really vague really cut and paste, it didn't even mention adoption issues. There were no suggestions, nothing it was just a complete waste of time, I'll show it to you if you want. It was so disappointing, she had never even met him, she observed him once.

I: and then wrote a report based on. .

P3: on an observation and what other people had said,

I: Right ok

P3: so she didn't even think about it, she didn't put any thought into it. He's a bit unusual, he's not maybe the usual kind of child educational psychologists need to assess, do you think?

I: I don't know

P3: he didn't have any disabilities, because he was slightly different, she didn't think about, put any thought into any of it.

I: How did that make you feel at the time?

P3: it was just a waste of paper, we got it after, you know he had left school by then anyway but she didn't add anything to it. She spent most of the year first of all refusing to assess, sending it back and then she used to come to the meetings but

she'd say because all these other people are involved I'm going to take a back seat which is what she did, she'd sit there but didn't say anything and only wrote the report in January after he'd left you know a few months later. She didn't want anything to do with it really.

I: So were there any particular services that you felt

P3: nobody wanted to do anything with it, the SENCO literally sat in these almost weekly meetings and sometimes there were thirteen professionals in the room

I: Wow that must have been

P3: we'd have the SENCO, we'd have the teacher, teaching assistant, three people from the special behaviour team, the manager and the two workers, the Headteacher, the inclusion manager all sorts of people but I think it was too many people actually everybody wanted somebody else to do something about it.

I: And how was that for you going into those meetings?

P3: oh and our social worker used to come too. . . it was ok, it was just a waste of time, nothing ever got achieved and the meetings would all start 'say something positive about *son*' and we'd have to go round and it would take half an hour, we didn't want all that, we wanted to get to the problem you know say what are we going to do about the problem, just such a waste of time the whole thing, it's just ridiculous. . .so yeah. So who helped, the SENCO didn't say anything, educational psychologist didn't want to do it, CAMHS, they did the best assessment, they were really good, it was a one off assessment

I: Right and what was that to do with? What assessment did they do?

P3: to see what they thought his issues were, they diagnosed him with attachment problems, which we knew anyway but they did a really thoughtful, nice assessment, that's the best one we had actually. Also the clinical psychologist from the adoption agency. So we had those reports but nobody really. . .

I: Didn't use them or?

P3: they'd seen them but they didn't really have an affect. . . who else did we have, oh our social worker was really good, really, really good, we got lots of support from her and the adoption agency.

I: And what was it about the fact they were really good and that they were supportive

P3: They diagnosed attachment problems, nobody else did, the educational psychologist did not obviously understand attachment problems, I don't know whether that is on the normal training, was it a lot of it or was it half a day or something?

I: no it is, we've done a lot on attachment, yeah

P3: I don't know what went wrong with her honestly, I don't know, yeah so the adoption agency was brilliant, they would come to the meetings with us, they would be quite stern at times about you know, you can't be using a time out chair with him, it will make him worse. They gave them information about attachment friendly schools and discipline systems which in the meetings they say yes yes we understand but then they wouldn't put it into practice. So they say things like, we'll stop using the time out chair and the red card, you know the public shaming stuff, so they said they stopped doing it and then *son* would come home and say I got red cards today so I'd have to say to the Headteacher, you know this has happened and then she'd go to the teacher and say you know it didn't really happen like this but *son* is telling me I've got a red card, and I said what did it look like and he said it was a red piece of paper and I had to go sit on the carpet holding the red piece of paper, he did and you know they almost denied it happened

I: right

P3: so they'd say things in meetings that didn't get filtered down, I think it's because so many people involved, his teaching assistant hated him, I don't know and then they got someone else because she was finding it too much the woman that didn't like him so they got someone to do the afternoons who was much more experienced, she was very young she was like 23 something like that, she just couldn't cope with him and they got someone who was about to retire, she'd been doing it 25 years but she couldn't cope with him either, we used to hand over to her actually she'd do mornings and she'd be in tears before he'd even started

I: She would be in tears?

P3: Yeah [laughter] she'd be all tearful like me, we don't know what to do with him, he's so unpredictable, she used to cry because she felt so sad about it I think

I: Oh Ok

P3: But still it's not good is it? Nobody was in control

I: No it's not, No

P3: we had one that hated him and one that was crying, everyone else running round not knowing, he'd just completely cause chaos in that school. . .it's quite interesting isn't it that splitting, that's what he was doing to them at school [laughter] I mean he was.

I: Yeah, the way he was feeling, he was creating that feeling in everyone else wasn't he?

P3: he was, he was in control of them all, he was in control, he was the one being taken out and sat with the Headmistress alone in the office, he probably wanted all that, in the end he wasn't in the class, he wasn't allowed. They just used to take him out constantly, he was either in the playground by himself or in the Headmistresses office, just he quite liked his one to one adults away from the noise but even then he started trashing the Headmistresses [office], he through coffee over her computer and then he wasn't allowed in there anymore [laughter] nothing worked [laughter] but he was in control, he did it, he destroyed it, he destroyed the school, he was only 4 [laughter] 4 and 5.

I: but in their communication with you, when they were phoning you each day, how did that feel?

P3: horrible getting phone calls when I was at work or on the way to work.

I: and what were they expecting from you?

P3: come back and pick him up

I: Come back and remove him, right

P3: and then the clinical psychologist from the adoption agency, when she wrote her report that, it did change, she said you have to stop doing that because he never knows how long he is going to be there.

I: Yeah

P3: she didn't want him to know his behaviour would mean he would go home immediately, so she said there should be a rule that he is there for 3 hours, never less than 3 hours and if it's going to increase slowly then it should never go down again so it be slow so he knows what is going on, so they did do that, they stuck at the 3 hours but they didn't move it up

I: right

P3: so they did do that, they didn't, I think it was too late by then, it didn't make any difference to the way he behaved, so they did stop phoning me after that, about half way through the year

I: right ok

P3: they wouldn't ask me to come and take him home, which was better, it was better, they just had to do something else with him which you know, they you know, found very hard.

I: Yeah

P3: they didn't know what to do with him for three hours, it was really hard, even for three hours they couldn't do anything, couldn't manage him. . .

I: but he's doing well now?

P3: yeah, you wouldn't know. If I tell people they can't even see it

I: Yeah

P3: people just think I'm being an over anxious parent, I think.

I: what at the moment or. . .

P3: I think people don't know the back ground so you know, like moving here they don't know anything about his background, so I want to warn them a little bit, you know I have to explain why I don't want him going off to their house without me being there, so I tell them bits about you know how he's been and stuff. I can just tell they don't believe me or they think I'm being anxious but it's better than

I: really, yeah

P3: to be thought of as anxious rather than him doing something terrible and they don't want their kids to play with him anymore [laughter], I'd rather be a bit cautious.

I: is that what it's about then, preventing other children from not wanting to be friends with him

P3: I don't want him to hurt other kids because he can really hurt some of them, like he kicked a girl in the head and her face was swollen up in school, he can really injure them, he pushed a girl recently, when we moved here. When we first moved here, he was stressed, much worse for a few weeks and he pushed a girls right out of the top of a tree and then her mum came to help her and he started hitting the mum and kicking her. You know he can be really

I: mmm

P3: so I don't want anything like that to happen to people I'm going to try to be friends with [laughter] in the community

I: yeah

P3: that would be really, especially since we've moved. After that thing in the playground with the tree, I've been so paranoid. . . I have to supervise him. I'm relaxing a bit now because I know who he gets on with. He's got some friends who I think he will probably be totally fine with even for half a day or a day, other friends I know, there'd be triggers. We've got friends across the road who are home educating their 6 year old so it would be nice to be good friends with them but every time he sees the boy, there's some kind of physical thing so

I: Oh right

P3: the other boy is not very good at sharing and that's one of his triggers

I: right ok

P3: George goes over and wants to play with a toy, and *friend* is like no you can't have it, no you can't have that and then something flips and so I wouldn't let him go without me

I: right ok, I see

P3: he's got actually next week, we're doing the first one without me. . . I hope it works out

I: Aww

P3: with one of his friends that he seems to get on fine with, so hopefully it will be ok

I: Yeah, it will be nice for you if he can develop that

P3: yeah if nothing happens over a few times, I will relax a bit

I: Yeah, it sounds like you're kind of on edge quite a lot, maybe not on edge that's probably the wrong thing, but you're watching

P3: Yeah all the time, yeah, yeah

I: it must be difficult to relax.

P3: At the home ed groups all the other parents, a lot of them will drop their kids off and go

I: right

P3: or they will sit chatting to each other but I'm usually watching [laughter] but you can't switch off as much as other people do. . .

I: do you envisage a time where you might be able to?

P3: I don't know, hopefully, I imagine, well we'll be in trouble if he's thirteen, fourteen and he can't do anything on his own [laughter] without me watching, I hope it changes.

I: I'm sure it will, I'm sure it will. So you know the education and health care plan he's got now, does that, how does that work with him being home educated, do you see, does it give you anything, because I don't know that side of things in terms of how it works.

P3: No, we came from *area* , I think they know they've made a mess of it, it's not their fault but erm they all knew about him, the whole of the borough knew about him.

I: right ok

P3: you know the virtual head, we got him involved, tried to get people to know we needed help, I was trying to get him to a special school or something like that but it didn't happen so they all knew about him so when I took him out, I made it really clear that I felt we were forced to do this and it wasn't elective, they call it elective home education, I kept saying it's not, we're doing this because you haven't been able to provide anywhere that can manage him

I: Yeah

P3: because we couldn't think of anywhere else he could go so because of that, it took ten months but in the end they agreed to give me funding. They're supposed to be giving me, we got a lot of money two and a half thousand a term

I: right ok

P3: but we didn't get it until just before we moved so we got one payment but it took a long time and that was supposed to fund two days in forest school because there was a place there he could have been for two more days a week and the plan was for me to gradually leave him alone there, and get used to

I: Yeah

P3: and that was expensive and they agreed to fund that but everything we did, like swimming, the travel, it was quite a lot of money in the end but now we've moved here they want to take it off me [laughter] which I knew they would

I: really?

P3: yeah

I: will it not transfer

P3: if they transferred it straight away, but we've been here more than five months and they've not given me any money and now they're starting to quibble about they shouldn't pay me transport and they shouldn't do this, so I haven't got a penny yet, we're waiting for that and I think they're just going to try and take it all off me. In the end we got a lot of good, financial support from *previous area* and they agreed the highest funding level for when he was going to go back to school. That took a lot but they did, they were going to give him eighteen thousand pounds extra,

I: right

P3: which is a lot and everybody said he wouldn't get it because he hasn't got a diagnosis but they agreed it in the end but I think here, they'll take it away. He'll be assessed and they'll say no he doesn't need it. So that means when he goes back to school, will they pay for one to one, they probably won't. Or they'll probably just decide he'll go for an hour a day, forever [laughter] because that's cheap

I: Yeah, doesn't seem helpful though

P3: I think they will, so that's what's happening, I think that's why they sent the educational psychologist round, I'm a bit paranoid, I think they want to reassess and say he doesn't need what *previous area* thought he needed.

I: Ok. Do you think there will be pressure for him to go to school?

P3: that educational psychologist seemed really good, I haven't seen him before and he was completely different

I: right ok

P3: than the other one we had contact with.

I: good

P3: he was really experienced and don't know if that was just the reason, he'd done loads of reports and he seemed to know a lot about attachment, he knew about

home education, he knew a lot about it so maybe he understood the situation, he was really good, really good.

I: good

P3: I haven't seen the report yet [laughter] but I think he's going to say he's doing well now. He was saying to me, you know, what do you want me to say in a way. Are you hoping to get him into school in September or are you not? . . . so in the end we just said no, you know there's no point pretending we're going back to school this September. He could recognise a lot of the benefits, he was saying time out from being traumatised you know alone you know is helping his brain to develop

I: Yeah

P3: which is true, he was so stressed, it was very bad for his brain

I: Yeah

P3: he was only young, he's been out of that because it was a traumatic situation being in school so we moved him from that. I don't know what he is missing out on, I think he kind of understood that because he knows he goes to lots of social groups erm, he's getting a maths tutor, that's one thing they have done here, I didn't ask for that but they gave it which has been brilliant actually, so I've got that twice a week, he's a little bit behind but he's not too bad, so I think he's going to be quite supportive in his report

I: good

P3: so we'll see what they make of it, when they get it. Yeah, he's not going to say he needs to go back to school, I know he's not

I: right, good. . . is there anything else?

P3: I don't know, is there anything else you want to know?

I: I think we've probably covered most things, thank you for sharing your story.

P3: that's alright

Additional recording

I: no, I was just going to ask, do you think adoptive parents go into adoption knowing what they might face in terms of eventually home schooling or . . .

P3: no

I: . . . giving up your job, it's massive isn't it?

P3: I suppose you don't think it's going to happen to you, you do hear about the worst case scenarios, they tell you a bit in training, they don't tell you, I don't remember them ever saying be prepared for your child not being able to cope with school, I don't remember that, it's such a big thing isn't it for so many.

I: yeah and the impact school has on home life, your family I think. In my experience it can be quite massive

P3: yeah, they never said to use be prepared that one of you might not be able to go back to work. That happens all the time, just from reading the forums. So many people say they thought they would go back to work and they couldn't. That's it you can never go back to work until your child is an adult. We didn't even think about that, actually when he was in school that was definitely going to happen

I: yeah, so you didn't go back to work?

P3: no I did go back but I had to leave after three months, I gave him a month in school and I thought that would be plenty of time to get settled [laughter] and I went back two days a week so I did that but I think I left, I did three months and then they said he's only allowed one hour a day from January. I still remember finding out at work about that and I couldn't really work after that any more, my parents, at that time they couldn't look after him because he was too aggressive and stuff so

I: Yeah I don't think when you go into adoption, I'm not sure you're fully told, or it's fully explained the potential is not really discussed in terms of impact.

P3: I suppose some training is better than others

I: Yeah

P3: I think I thought, I don't remember them talking about school so much and they should definitely have put more in about that

I: Yeah

P3: the potential for giving up work, that you might have to, yeah.

I: Ok.

Stage 3: Abbreviated transcription: Anna

1 We didn't have any problems in the adoption process. So we did it quite quickly, we
2 were approved and he was identified for us about 3 months later. He was the first
3 child that we thought about, so then it went quite smoothly. He was from
4 [northwest town] and we lived in [south east] so we came up to [northwest town]
5 and spent a week there which was quite intense but the foster carers were very nice
6 and then she brought him up to [south east] for a week and it seemed to go really
7 well. We're still in touch with her, we got on fine with her she's a lovely person. We
8 thought [son] was alright. For the first 3 months he seemed fine but then he started
9 to get really aggressive. I think he was probably in shock for the first 3 months and
10 we didn't know, we thought he was alright and he really wasn't. So since then we've
11 had a lot of problems with aggression but then that settled probably after about 10
12 months. I think he was just angry with us because we took him away, he didn't
13 understand, then he gradually got better with us, he was ok and then he started
14 nursery and did really well in nursery. He was with us for 8 or 9 months . . . with just
15 him at home and my partner was off as well, so both of us were off. So we gave him
16 as good a start as we could really and then when he went to nursery he was only
17 part time and he did ok, he was fine, really good and he made friends and got on
18 well with the teachers. There was about 5 incidents of him being aggressive and
19 quite badly aggressive like picking up a chair and threatening the teacher with it.
20 Things that they were shocked by, you know more than other kids but only about 5
21 times in a year but we were a little bit worried but not too bad. And then, when he
22 went to reception it was just horrific . . . a million times worse, awful, horrendous . .
23 . within days, he just couldn't cope with it . . . He started off, after 3 days the
24 teachers said we're really worried because he won't follow instructions . . . he won't
25 do what we tell him, he'll just go off and do his own thing. She just noticed that and
26 then he started to be really aggressive to her and the teaching assistants and then
27 he started to be aggressive to the other children and just, very quickly within a few
28 weeks it was just totally unmanageable. He just spent all day being aggressive
29 he was alright, he was fine . . . we wouldn't have known anything was happening
30 except we were told by the teachers, he was alright with us. But then, it got worse

31 and worse and worse, you know trashing classes, biting, kicking. You know they
32 couldn't do anything with him so . . . weekly meetings with the head . . . and we had
33 so many assessments . . . at the beginning, from October we knew he wasn't going
34 to cope actually, so there were lots of things we tried to do, we said can we take him
35 out of reception and start again next year because he's summer born. We should
36 have done that at the start, ask for a deferment but I didn't know he was going to
37 struggle. Thinking back I should have definitely done it because he wasn't able to,
38 we hadn't realised. They said no to that and then we said can he have a full time
39 teaching assistant with him . . . 'I'm afraid we don't have funding for that.' They had
40 different bits of people coming in to help him but no one person, we just needed
41 more support. I think in a class of 30 he was just really scared obviously . . . really
42 terrified I think, that came out in aggression. In nursery there's a lot more adults and
43 a lot less children . . . it was quieter. School was . . . 30 kids, 1 teacher and a
44 teaching assistant that was between, two classes actually . . . so it was just too
45 much, he was just really scared. He just needs a lot of adult attention, now we
46 know, we didn't know he just needs adults looking after him all the time otherwise
47 he just feels frightened. He doesn't like too many children around him, he needs a
48 lot of adult attention, he just feels like he disappears, you know he's not safe,
49 nobody's caring for him enough. So he had all sorts of people, he had educational
50 psychologist, clinical psychologist, specialist behavioural team. He was the youngest
51 they'd ever worked with. They got a specialist worker in you know, the SENCO
52 obviously did nothing, she didn't know what to do, she didn't suggest anything . . .
53 referred to CAMHS, they rejected us at first, we eventually got an assessment. . .
54 educational psychology rejected us at first. Each was saying we should have the
55 other. So CAMHS were saying the EP should see him, they were saying no it was a
56 CAMHS problem, it lasted for months, honestly. 6 months you know . . . we got an
57 assessment but it was towards the end of the year and the specialist behaviour team
58 started. . . I think midway through the year towards the end, a bit more towards the
59 end. So all these things came in but it was way too late. So I think by then he got in
60 such a bad pattern of behaviour, there was nothing you could do with him . . .
61 maybe nothing would have worked. I don't know, but by then it was definitely too
62 late and they did other things you know like let him spend time in nursery a little bit.

63 It wasn't consistent. I think they didn't have enough time to really deal with him so
64 they agreed to do lots of things and let him be in nursery for part of each day . . .
65 and stuff like that but it didn't always happen, it happened occasionally. They were
66 just overwhelmed, they couldn't do it and they didn't have funding to get him extra
67 support. So by January, he did have his own one to one teacher but four months in I
68 think even that was a bit too late . . . and we thought that might help and it did for a
69 couple of week help but no, he started being really aggressive to her and she really
70 hated him actually in the end. You could tell she really hated him, I'm not sure she
71 was the right person. It just wasn't going to work. And then, . . . they reduced his
72 hours to 1 hour a day for ages and that seemed ok but only because he was there
73 for 1 hour. He was easier to manage and then he was aggressive in an hour. But
74 they started increasing it and they decreased it, you know it was just up and down.
75 It was all chaos, nobody knew what to do so in the end they put him on part time
76 from about 9 months from 1 hour to 2 hours to 3 and then they got stuck on 3 hours
77 forever. I was trying to work, I had a job then because I'd gone back to work and I
78 kept being called home from work every day, almost every day, sometimes it was
79 like 20 past 9 in the morning and I'd be on the way to work they phone to say you
80 have to pick him up now. So I had to give up work. . . the whole thing was awful,
81 really terrible. He got so stressed and the whole year you could see he got really
82 bad dandruff and his lips were bleeding all the time with stress and . . . it was awful,
83 really awful but we kept going and going because they kept saying it might get
84 better. They wanted these assessments done, it took all year to get the assessments
85 done because we wanted an EHCP. But actually at the end of the year things had not
86 got any better at all, they wouldn't let us go back, we wanted him to maybe repeat
87 reception but they wouldn't let us do that so we couldn't do anything else. We
88 couldn't send him back to school in year 1 so we've kept him out since then.
89 . . . he just about held on, it was awful but he did just finish it at the same time as
90 everyone else instead of taking him out, we didn't want him to know we were taking
91 him out because of his behaviour because we thought that might not be good for
92 him to know that if he kicks off . . . so he never knew it was because of that. . . so he
93 finished at the same time as his friends so he noticed a bit less. So since then we've
94 just said that school is too difficult for you, we'll go back when you're older and it's a

95 bit easier for you and you need more time at home so that was that . . . it's our
96 second year home-schooling . . . so we got an EHCP, we made the school apply for it
97 just before the end . . . and then we spent the next 10 months trying to get it at
98 home and they finally gave it to us just before we moved. So we got an EHCP
99 because we wanted to try again, that was the plan to take a year out and try again
100 but with all the support at the beginning but then he was doing so well we just
101 couldn't face going back and we were supposed to go back September next year and
102 we decided not to go back then either, maybe the one after [laughter] it keeps
103 getting extended [laughter]. It's a possibility. . . I don't know, I think me and my
104 partner disagree a little bit because I think he's doing so well I'd like to keep him out
105 because I think whatever we do I think school will be a disaster again and I can't face
106 it. . . it's just so damaging for him.

107 . . . not entirely, still when he is stressed it happens with other children, so it's not
108 been perfect with home education, there's still problems but there much more
109 manageable because I'm there all the time . . . so I can step in if I see something
110 happening. I can remove him . . . and in school he was uncontrollable but outside,
111 people think he's maybe a bit rough sometimes, some of the other kids think he's a
112 bit rough but he doesn't really stand out that much, only a little bit and in school he
113 was just off the scale but outside he's in social groups, we do a lot of activities
114 everyday. Home education groups, gymnastics and drama groups and like all sorts of
115 things and there he manages ok. We've had problems . . . so he gets all his
116 socialising and he's made brilliant friends but the groups are smaller, there's usually
117 only 6, 7, 8 maybe 12 children so they're manageable and I'm there in the
118 background so I can see if he's getting stressed and if I need to I'll step in and take
119 him out until he's calmed down and put him back in. That's what he needs, he does
120 get stressed, he just needs somebody there with him . . . get him out quickly,
121 recognise the triggers and stuff because it does happen very quick but I know the
122 kinds of things that will set him off. Things like having to follow instructions which is
123 bad for school obviously. So the groups that he has to do what he's told all the time
124 he finds really hard, so like gymnastics they tell him . . . I don't know if you know but
125 they have to do line work and he's really struggled with that, he just flops on the
126 floor and refuses to do anything, gets really stressed. And at the beginning I had to

127 take him out a few times but now the teacher's got to know him, he's got to know
128 the teacher and he still flops around you know falls on the ground when he doesn't
129 want to do things. But actually he does it in quite good humour and he's not been
130 aggressive, you know he's fine . . . it took about 10 weeks before he started relaxing
131 . . . knowing what to expect, getting to know everybody, the teacher knowing him
132 but you know just took a long time I think. But it was a very controlled group, so it
133 was different with a school class of 30, you know it's 12 kids a lot of them are quite a
134 bit older, more mature . . . you know some of them are younger. I think the age mix
135 helps him as well, you get a lot of that in home education groups. So he's got older
136 kids to look after him and he's got younger ones that he can look after, you know he
137 responds to that well rather than everyone being the same age and competing with
138 each other, which I think doesn't suit him.

139 Oh definitely that's why, yeah,
140 definitely the number of children
141 . . . he needs more adult attention . . . he needs a lot to feel safe which I didn't
142 realise but he does . . . it's smaller groups, I'm there. In home education groups they
143 are less strict so if he doesn't want to do something they won't usually force him to
144 do it they'll either ignore him or let me take him out. But with school there's a lot
145 more pressure to do what he was told. He's got a lot of control issues like a lot of
146 adopted kids, I think I've seen it a lot, they don't like being controlled by other
147 people, they need to be in control so they don't like always doing what they're told.
148 So if stressed the default will be no I'm not doing it. He does that a lot . . . being
149 adopted is part of his experience. I think his life was so out of control for a few
150 years. He had four different families and he was only 2 years 9 months but . . . just
151 that a part from anything else . . . when he was still at home; a lot of fighting and
152 arguing. . . all of his experience is pretty uncontrollable and he didn't know what was
153 going to happen to him next. And he loved his foster carers . . . 21 months he was
154 there. I think he was just getting on all right. If he had stayed there he probably
155 would have been all right, it was just that final move that really did him in, I think . . .
156 he's being great now, he's brilliant. He's never been so happy, you can just see, just
157 this year actually, this last six months he's done brilliantly. Finally he's just relaxed
158 and he really enjoys what he does, he's got friends, he feels quite good about

159 himself, you know he always felt awful, because everybody, knew he was a bad one
160 . . . you know in the playground all the kids would be saying oh that's the bad one.
161 Which I don't blame them because . . . they were scared of him. But he doesn't get
162 that now, he's got lots of friends
163 P3: School wise but he's been alright since then . . . he only ever talks about the
164 lunches, he used to like the lunches [laughter] he still talks about that. When he was
165 first taken out, he talked a lot about it, said he wanted to go back which surprised
166 us. He constantly 'I wanna go back, when can I go back I miss my friends.' . . . he
167 didn't have any friends, not really, a few, not good, he didn't, cos of his behaviour,
168 he wasn't able to form friendships. You know I think he felt a sense of loss, he felt
169 he was missing out, he did feel a sense of loss about leaving school but we knew it
170 was the right thing definitely. We knew if he went back, it would be no good. But
171 now he doesn't want to go back to school anymore, because he's happy, really
172 happy . . . so we do talk about him going back to school, and he says things like, 'I
173 want to go back to school but I want it to be a school where I'm the only child', he
174 says it all the time. So I think he knows he can't cope if there are too many children
175 around, that's what he says. And when he was in school he used to say there was
176 too many children, he says that himself that's what it is. . . You know I say there are
177 no schools like that, if you go to school there will be a lot of other children. He
178 doesn't want to go. So he says he'll go if he knows someone else in the class, so he'll
179 say can I go to school with one of my friends. We'll have to see. . . I think because
180 I've been doing all of it and I've met loads of people who just do it like that, they just
181 keep the kids out until they're 14 or if they want to go to college, they can go to
182 college. So it's become really normal to me when I see it all around me and I see that
183 the kids are doing quite well. But *partner* has been quite separated from it. . . She
184 works full time so I think it's not become so normalised for her. I think, she just
185 can't imagine what it will be like to have him at home when he's older. She thinks it
186 would be too much, trying to teach him. . . she just can't imagine it but I've seen
187 other people do it so I think it would be alright actually but she wants him to go back
188 to school but we both agree . . . not this September but the one after. So that's
189 where we are [laughter] we're stretching it out [laughter] but you know it's hard for
190 her because she's cut off from it all. And I think in a school she'd understand it more

191 and would pick him up and be more involved. But here it's a separate life, this way
192 it's very separate. She doesn't know the people I know, she doesn't see what we do
193 and I think she feels quite left out I think. And also the financial, I've had to give up
194 work and we've had to move here because we couldn't afford to live in London
195 anymore, it caused us a lot of problems.
196 Huge! Everything has changed
197 we didn't have the option . . . he couldn't go back to school, even if he went back to
198 school I can't work, everybody says it would have to be really reduced hours. The
199 educational psychologist said the other day, he recommended if he went back he'd
200 do an hour a day you know if that took a year, then you know . . . it would have to
201 be a year, so you know that's the worst of both worlds. That's an hour a day I'm tied
202 to the school, I'd have to do what they tell me. It's involving lots of professionals.
203 You know it's very stressful, meetings and people that don't understand. This way
204 I'm in control of it. So if he was at school for an hour a day, he'd still be getting
205 behind with his work. I'd be controlled by them you know, I wouldn't be able to do
206 what I wanted and when he was doing part time before he would be stressed after
207 school. I couldn't do work with him after school, you know so that just feels like a
208 horrible option to me. So I won't be able to work anyway if he was at school. We
209 can't use after school clubs because he can't really be looked after by other people
210 very easily. Sometimes, my parents for a short time but you know I can't just ask
211 friends to pick him up because he kicks off. I don't let him go to other kids houses
212 without me being there because occasionally, not very often there would be an
213 incident and I don't want other parents having to deal with it. . . I want to be there
214 and get him out quick. I don't know if I'll be able to work again either way, so . . .
215 what's the incentive to go to school? Not much. . . I don't see what he would gain
216 from being at school, I really don't
217 I think slowly it will acclimatise him but I just don't think it would work, maybe it
218 would work, I don't know, I don't know
219 I was, everybody was, everybody was out of control. Nobody knew what to do . . .
220 He was out of control, I couldn't control it because I wasn't there. I felt like it was
221 my responsibility but I wasn't there you know and they looked to me like what shall
222 we do and I was just like, I don't know, he's not like this at home, so I didn't know. I

223 wanted them to tell me what to do or you know I thought they'd know what to do
224 but they didn't. . . Maybe there are better schools definitely, it probably wasn't the
225 best school but it wasn't the worst, I don't know. I think any school would have
226 really struggled with him definitely, any school unless it was a class of 12 with an
227 extra teaching assistant you know but you'd have to pay for private school for that
228 wouldn't you. And even that I don't know, they have their small classes, they
229 probably do. I think that's what he might cope with, that . . . or a special school
230 would be alright, but then how do we get hold of a special school? It's almost
231 impossible isn't it? He's not got a diagnosis of anything. It would take years to get
232 hold of one and the process would be so horrible because he would have to fail
233 again at school . . . he'd have to go through all that. But he'd be alright in a special
234 school but is he better at being home educated? Probably, at a special school the
235 other kids wouldn't be the same as him, they'd be there for different reasons.
236 Special school for adopted kids, yes they do exist but they're not round here are
237 they. There's one in Reading isn't there but what choice do we have? They'd
238 understand and there'd be other kids with similar issues. I'm sure he would be
239 alright in that kind of school

240 I think they should have attachment training, that school didn't until four months in
241 and even then just one teacher going on it . . . there were too many staff involved.
242 In the end, his teacher got sent off for a day, that's fine a day but then she was
243 expected to tell everyone else what she'd learned. I don't know how well that
244 works, that trickle down training, maybe it does work, it's what people do now send
245 one on training.

246 Smaller group, more adults but also he wasn't told what to do all day. He can do a
247 bit of following instructions but when it's constantly all day. So what went wrong, I
248 think the things they should have changed from the beginning. He had a very strict
249 teacher who shouted a lot, that's especially a big no, no, because when you shout at
250 him he gets into his 'No I'm not!' and that makes him more aggressive, he gets
251 scared so starts fighting. So she shouted a lot, she was known for shouting, I didn't
252 know that until it was too late, she actually left because a lot of parents complained
253 about her way before the end. It wasn't just *son*, but she was the worst teacher
254 for him . . . and they asked me in to shadow for a few days in order to support him

255 so I saw a lot of things that were happening that I didn't know. There was a time out
256 chair in the room, the whole school did that, but I didn't know. There was a chair
257 that naughty children could sit on in front of everyone and used, in front of me she
258 did this. I don't know what it was like when I wasn't there. He wouldn't take his
259 gloves off so when they came in they had to take their coats and gloves off and he
260 wanted to keep his gloves on and . . . he wouldn't take them off. It was a little thing.
261 Why didn't she just ignore it and let him keep his gloves on if it makes him feel
262 better but he had to go on the time out chair for that. Not taking his gloves off. And
263 then they all had to say good morning one by one when she did the register and he
264 didn't say anything. He didn't used to like saying hello in front of people or
265 anything, so he was silent, so she put him on the time out chair for that and that was
266 just non-violent things. So that wasn't great, it made him much worse. So she was
267 constantly making him do lots of things. There was no leeway for her letting him
268 relax and it was not just leave him, leave his gloves, if he doesn't say anything just
269 let him be quiet.

270 The Headteacher did. . . the teacher didn't. . . I think the Headteacher had words
271 with her I think but she wouldn't change anything so then they moved his class to
272 another teacher who he'd had in nursery and had moved to year 1 which I thought
273 brilliant that will be the answer, but no. A couple of weeks he did ok and then, it
274 was like the same again, but I don't know whether because of his bad start it just
275 carried on, if he'd started with a different teacher from the beginning, maybe. I
276 don't know, I think his issues are so deep routed actually I don't think any school
277 would have been good but there could have been better schools. Yeah the teachers
278 thought he was just being naughty on purpose, definitely. She was trying to break
279 his will, I think she thought, impose her authority he'd start listening, it works for
280 some other kids I'm sure but . . . he was only four and a half, it's horrible thinking
281 about it,

282 so had a zero tolerance thing for him and other boys I heard, or just everyone I
283 suppose, that's how she ran her classes, yeah there's no understanding about . . .
284 refusal to follow instructions might be because he's anxious. It's a control issue
285 thing, let him have control over a few things, like keeping his gloves on, that would
286 really have helped but nobody understood that I think in the whole school.

287 just reading I think, we've had lots of assessments, I do feel like I understand him
288 and general adoption issues really well now . . . we had a really good social worker
289 from our adoption agency, we had a psychology assessment, she was really helpful.
290 Educational psychologist with the school was absolutely useless I must say. She had
291 nothing to add, she just had no suggestions, the report was just really vague really,
292 cut and paste, it didn't even mention adoption issues. There were no suggestions,
293 nothing it was just a complete waste of time, I'll show it to you if you want. It was so
294 disappointing, she had never even met him, she observed him once . . . so she didn't
295 even think about it, she didn't put any thought into it. He's a bit unusual, he's not
296 maybe the usual kind of child educational psychologists need to assess, do you
297 think? He didn't have any disabilities, because he was slightly different, she didn't
298 think about, put any thought into any of it. It was just a waste of paper, we got it
299 after . . . he had left school by then anyway but she didn't add anything to it. She
300 spent most of the year, first of all refusing to assess, sending it back. And then she
301 used to come to the meetings but she'd say because all these other people are
302 involved, I'm going to take a back seat which is what she did, she'd sit there but
303 didn't say anything and only wrote the report in January after he'd left you know a
304 few months later. She didn't want anything to do with it really. Nobody wanted to
305 do anything with it, the SENCO literally sat in these almost weekly meetings and
306 sometimes there were thirteen professionals in the room. We'd have the SENCO,
307 we'd have the teacher, teaching assistant, three people from the special behaviour
308 team, the manager and the two workers, the Headteacher, the inclusion manager all
309 sorts of people but I think it was too many people. Actually everybody wanted
310 somebody else to do something about it. Oh and our social worker used to come
311 too. . . it was ok, it was just a waste of time. Nothing ever got achieved and the
312 meetings would all start 'say something positive about *son*', and we'd have to go
313 round and it would take half an hour. We didn't want all that, we wanted to get to
314 the problem you know say what are we going to do about the problem. Just such a
315 waste of time the whole thing. It's just ridiculous. . . So who helped? The SENCO
316 didn't say anything, educational psychologist didn't want to do it, CAMHS, they did
317 the best assessment, they were really good, it was a one off assessment to see what
318 they thought his issues were. They diagnosed him with attachment problems, which

319 we knew anyway but they did a really thoughtful, nice assessment. That's the best
320 one we had actually. Also the clinical psychologist from the adoption agency. So we
321 had those reports . . . but they didn't really have an affect. . . who else did we have?
322 Oh our social worker was really good, really, really good. We got lots of support
323 from her and the adoption agency.
324 They diagnosed attachment problems, nobody else did, the educational psychologist
325 did not obviously understand attachment problems. I don't know whether that is on
326 the normal training . . .
327 I don't know what went wrong with her honestly. . . so the adoption agency was
328 brilliant, they would come to the meetings with us, they would be quite stern at
329 times about . . . 'You can't be using a time out chair with him, it will make him
330 worse.' They gave them information about attachment friendly schools and
331 discipline systems. Which in the meetings they say 'Yes, yes, we understand' but
332 then they wouldn't put it into practice. So they say things like, 'We'll stop using the
333 time out chair and the red card', you know the public shaming stuff. So they said
334 they stopped doing it, and then *son* would come home and say, 'I got red cards
335 today.' So I'd have to say to the Headteacher, you know this has happened. And
336 then, she'd go to the teacher and say you know it didn't really happen like this. But
337 *son* is telling me I've got a red card, and I said, 'what did it look like?' and he said,
338 'it was a red piece of paper and I had to go sit on the carpet holding the red piece of
339 paper.' He did and you know they almost denied it happened. So they'd say things
340 in meetings that didn't get filtered down, I think it's because so many people [were]
341 involved. His teaching assistant hated him . . . and then they got someone else
342 because she was finding it too much, the woman that didn't like him. So they got
343 someone to do the afternoons who was much more experienced. She was very
344 young, she was like 23 something like that, she just couldn't cope with him. And
345 they got someone who was about to retire, she'd been doing it 25 years. But she
346 couldn't cope with him either. We used to hand over to her, actually she'd do
347 mornings, and she'd be in tears before he'd even started . . . 'we don't know what to
348 do with him, he's so unpredictable' she used to cry because she felt so sad about it I
349 think. But still it's not good is it? Nobody was in control. We had one that hated
350 him and one that was crying, everyone else running around not knowing. He'd just

351 completely cause chaos in that school. . .it's quite interesting isn't it that splitting,
352 that's what he was doing to them at school [laughter] I mean he was. . . he was in
353 control of them all. He was in control, he was the one being taken out and sat with
354 the Headmistress alone in the office. He probably wanted all that. In the end he
355 wasn't in the class, he wasn't allowed. They just used to take him out constantly. He
356 was either, in the playground by himself or in the Headmistresses office. . . he quite
357 liked his one to one adults away from the noise but even then he started trashing
358 the Headmistresses [office]. He threw coffee over her computer and then he wasn't
359 allowed in there anymore [laughter]. Nothing worked [laughter], but he was in
360 control, he did it, he destroyed it, he destroyed the school, he was only 4 [laughter],
361 4 and 5.

362 Horrible, getting phone calls when I was at work or on the way to work.

363 come back and pick him up and then the clinical psychologist from the adoption
364 agency, when she wrote her report . . . it did change, she said you have to stop doing
365 that because he never knows how long he is going to be there. She didn't want him
366 to know his behaviour would mean he would go home immediately. So she said
367 there should be a rule that he is there for 3 hours. Never less than 3 hours and if it's
368 going to increase slowly then it should never go down again. . . slow so he knows
369 what is going on. So they did do that, they stuck at the 3 hours but they didn't move
370 it up. So they did do that. I think it was too late by then, it didn't make any
371 difference to the way he behaved, so they did stop phoning me after that, about half
372 way through the year. They wouldn't ask me to come and take him home, which
373 was better. It was better, they just had to do something else with him which you
374 know, they . . . found very hard. They didn't know what to do with him for three
375 hours, it was really hard, even for three hours they couldn't do anything, couldn't
376 manage him. . .

377 yeah, you wouldn't know. If I tell people they can't even see it. People just think I'm
378 being an over anxious parent, I think. I think people don't know the back ground, so
379 you know, like moving here they don't know anything about his background. So I
380 want to warn them a little bit . . . I have to explain why I don't want him going off to
381 their house without me being there. So I tell them bits about you know how he's
382 been and stuff. I can just tell they don't believe me or they think I'm being anxious

383 but it's better than to be thought of as anxious. Rather than him doing something
384 terrible and they don't want their kids to play with him anymore [laughter], I'd
385 rather be a bit cautious. I don't want him to hurt other kids because he can really
386 hurt some of them. Like he kicked a girl in the head and her face was swollen up in
387 school. He can really injure them. He pushed a girl recently, when we moved here.
388 When we first moved here, he was stressed, much worse for a few weeks and he
389 pushed a girl right out of the top of a tree. And then her mum came to help her and
390 he started hitting the mum and kicking her. . . so I don't want anything like that to
391 happen to people I'm going to try to be friends with [laughter] in the community . . .
392 especially since we've moved. After that thing in the playground with the tree, I've
393 been so paranoid. . . I have to supervise him. I'm relaxing a bit now because I know
394 who he gets on with. He's got some friends who I think he will probably be totally
395 fine with even for half a day or a day. Other friends I know, there'd be triggers.
396 We've got friends across the road who are home educating their 6 year old so it
397 would be nice to be good friends with them but every time he sees the boy, there's
398 some kind of physical thing. So the other boy is not very good at sharing and that's
399 one of his triggers. *Son* goes over and wants to play with a toy, and *friend* is
400 like, 'no you can't have it, no you can't have that' and then something flips and so I
401 wouldn't let him go without me. . . next week, we're doing the first one without me.
402 . . I hope it works out . . . with one of his friends that he seems to get on fine with, so
403 hopefully it will be ok . . . if nothing happens over a few times, I will relax a bit. At
404 the Home Ed groups all the other parents, a lot of them will drop their kids off and
405 go or they will sit chatting to each other but I'm usually watching [laughter] but you
406 can't switch off as much as other people do. . .

407 I don't know, hopefully, I imagine, well we'll be in trouble if he's thirteen, fourteen
408 and he can't do anything on his own [laughter] without me watching, I hope it
409 changes.

410 No, we came from *area*. I think they know they've made a mess of it, it's not their
411 fault but they all knew about him, the whole of the borough knew about him. You
412 know the virtual head, we got him involved, tried to get people to know we needed
413 help. I was trying to get him to a special school or something like that but it didn't
414 happen. So they all knew about him. So when I took him out, I made it really clear

415 that I felt we were forced to do this and it wasn't elective. They call it elective home
416 education. I kept saying, 'it's not, we're doing this because you haven't been able to
417 provide anywhere that can manage him.' Because we couldn't think of anywhere
418 else he could go . . . it took ten months but in the end they agreed to give me
419 funding . . . we got a lot of money two and a half thousand a term. But we didn't get
420 it until just before we moved. So we got one payment but it took a long time. And
421 that was supposed to fund two days in forest school because there was a place
422 there he could have been for two more days a week. And the plan was for me to
423 gradually leave him alone there . . . and that was expensive and they agreed to fund
424 that. But everything we did, like swimming, the travel, it was quite a lot of money in
425 the end. But now we've moved here they want to take it off me [laughter] which I
426 knew they would. . . we've been here more than five months and they've not given
427 me any money and now they're starting to quibble about they shouldn't pay me
428 transport and they shouldn't do this. So I haven't got a penny yet. We're waiting for
429 that and I think they're just going to try and take it all off me. In the end we got a lot
430 of good, financial support from *previous area* and they agreed the highest funding
431 level for when he was going to go back to school. That took a lot but they did, they
432 were going to give him eighteen thousand pounds extra, which is a lot and
433 everybody said he wouldn't get it because he hasn't got a diagnosis. But they agreed
434 it in the end. But I think here, they'll take it away. He'll be assessed and they'll say
435 no he doesn't need it. So that means when he goes back to school, will they pay for
436 one to one, they probably won't. Or they'll probably just decide he'll go for an hour
437 a day, forever [laughter] because that's cheap. I think they will, so that's what's
438 happening, I think that's why they sent the educational psychologist round. I'm a bit
439 paranoid. I think they want to reassess and say he doesn't need what *previous
440 area* thought he needed. That educational psychologist seemed really good, I
441 haven't seen him before and he was completely different than the other one we had
442 contact with. He was really experienced and don't know if that was just the reason,
443 he'd done loads of reports and he seemed to know a lot about attachment, he knew
444 about home education, he knew a lot about it so maybe he understood the
445 situation, he was really good, really good. I haven't seen the report yet [laughter]
446 but I think he's going to say he's doing well now. He was saying to me, you know,

447 'what do you want me to say' in a way. 'Are you hoping to get him into school in
448 September or are you not?' . . . so in the end we just said 'no', you know there's no
449 point pretending we're going back to school this September. He could recognise a
450 lot of the benefits, he was saying time out from being traumatised . . . alone . . . is
451 helping his brain to develop.

452 Which is true, he was so stressed, it was very bad for his brain. He was only young,
453 he's been out of that because it was a traumatic situation being in school, so we
454 moved him from that. I don't know what he is missing out on. I think he kind of
455 understood that because he knows he goes to lots of social groups, he's getting a
456 maths tutor, that's one thing they have done here. I didn't ask for that but they gave
457 it which has been brilliant actually. So I've got that twice a week, he's a little bit
458 behind but he's not too bad, so I think he's going to be quite supportive in his
459 report. So we'll see what they make of it, when they get it. Yeah, he's not going to
460 say he needs to go back to school, I know he's not

461 I suppose you don't think it's going to happen to you. You do hear about the worst
462 case scenarios, they tell you a bit in training. . . I don't remember them ever saying,
463 be prepared for your child not being able to cope with school. I don't remember
464 that. It's such a big thing, isn't it, for so many. They never said to us be prepared
465 that one of you might not be able to go back to work. That happens all the time, just
466 from reading the forums. So many people say they thought they would go back to
467 work and they couldn't. That's it. You can never go back to work until your child is
468 an adult. We didn't even think about that, actually when he was in school that was
469 definitely going to happen. . . I did go back but I had to leave after three months. I
470 gave him a month in school and I thought that would be plenty of time to get settled
471 [laughter] and I went back two days a week. So I did that but I did three months and
472 then they said he's only allowed one hour a day from January. I still remember
473 finding out at work about that. And I couldn't really work after that any more, my
474 parents, at that time they couldn't look after him because he was too aggressive and
475 stuff . . . I don't remember them talking about school so much and they should
476 definitely have put more in about that the potential for giving up work, that you
477 might have to, yeah.

Abbreviated Transcript Coded: Anna

We didn't have any problems in the adoption process.	
He was the first child that we thought about,	
and it seemed to go really well. We thought [son] was all right. he seemed fine	Hopeful Unaware
but then he started to get really aggressive.	Turning point
I think he was probably in shock for the first 3 months	Reflection Shock
and we didn't know, we thought he was all right and he really wasn't.	We didn't know Unaware
I think he was just angry with us because we took him away,	Blame Responsible
he didn't understand,	He didn't understand
then he gradually got better with us,	Things got better
He was with us for 8 or 9 months . . .	Time
with just him at home	Focus
and my partner was off as well,	Together
So we gave him as good a start as we could really	We did our best
he did ok,	Hopeful
he was fine, really good	Positive
and he made friends	Typical/normal
and got on well with the teachers.	
There was about 5 incidents of him being aggressive and quite badly aggressive	Frequency Aggression
like picking up a chair and threatening the teacher with it.	Threat
Things that they were shocked by,	Different
. . . more than other kids	Shock
but only about 5 times in a year	Frequency
but we were a little bit worried but not too bad.	Concern Uncertainty
And then, when he went to reception it was just horrific . . .	Turning point

a million times worse, awful, horrendous . . .	Extreme Emotional
within days, he just couldn't cope with it . . .	Sudden Couldn't cope
He started off, after 3 days the teachers said we're really worried because he won't follow instructions	Expectations Concern Not like other children
. . . he won't do what we tell him,	Uncontrollable
he'll just go off and do his own thing.	
She just noticed that	
and then he started to be really aggressive to her and the teaching assistants	Aggression adults
and then he started to be aggressive to the other children	Aggression children
and just, very quickly within a few weeks it was just totally unmanageable.	Overwhelming Uncontrollable Unmanageable Sudden
He just spent all day being aggressive	Relentless Extreme Overwhelming

he was alright with us.	
But then, it got worse and worse and worse,	Overwhelming
you know trashing classes, biting, kicking.	Build up Extreme
You know they couldn't do anything with him	Uncontrollable
We should have done that at the start,	Regret
ask for a deferment	
but I didn't know he was going to struggle.	I didn't know
we hadn't realised.	
They had different bits of people coming in to help him	Unorganised Inconsistent
but no one person, we just needed more support.	We needed someone
I think in a class of 30 he was just really scared	Overwhelming

obviously . . . really terrified I think,	Fear Too much Communicating feelings
that came out in aggression.	
In nursery there's a lot more adults and a lot less children . . .	Adult support Manageable Environment
it was quieter.	
School was . . . 30 kids, 1 teacher and a teaching assistant	Overwhelming Provision Not enough support Fear
that was between, two classes actually . . .	
so it was just too much,	
he was just really scared.	
He just needs a lot of adult attention,	Connection Adult attention/ support Realisation We didn't know
now we know,	
we didn't know he just needs adults looking after him all the time	
otherwise he just feels frightened.	
He doesn't like too many children around him,	Overwhelming Environment
he needs a lot of adult attention,	
he just feels like he disappears,	Insignificant No connection Not safe Not cared for
you know he's not safe,	
nobody's caring for him enough.	
So he had all sorts of people, he had educational psychologist, clinical psychologist, specialist behavioural team.	Lots of professionals
He was the youngest they'd ever worked with.	Different Extreme Specialist
They got a specialist worker in. . .	
the SENCO obviously did nothing, she didn't know what to do, she didn't suggest anything . . .	She didn't know what to do
referred to CAMHS, they rejected us at first,	Rejection Passing responsibility
educational psychology rejected us at first.	
Each was saying we should have the other.	

So CAMHS were saying the EP should see him,	
they were saying no it was a CAMHS problem,	
it lasted for months, honestly. 6 months you know . . .	Time
we got an assessment but it was towards the end of the year	Too late
and the specialist behaviour team started. . .	
but by then it was definitely too late	
and they did other things you know like let him spend time in nursery a little bit.	Environment They tried
It wasn't consistent.	Inconsistency
I think they didn't have enough time to really deal with him	Time
so they agreed to do lots of things	They say things
and let him be in nursery for part of each day . . . and stuff like that	They didn't do it
but it didn't always happen, it happened occasionally.	
They were just overwhelmed,	overwhelmed
they couldn't do it and they didn't have funding to get him extra support.	They couldn't do it funding
So by January, he did have his own one to one teacher	
but four months in I think even that was a bit too late . . .	
and we thought that might help	
and it did for a couple of weeks help	
but no, he started being really aggressive to her	
and she really hated him actually in the end.	
You could tell she really hated him,	
I'm not sure she was the right person.	
It just wasn't going to work.	
And then, . . . they reduced his hours to 1 hour a day for ages	Turning point Time
and that seemed ok but only because he was there for 1 hour.	Things got better
He was easier to manage	Manageable
and then he was aggressive in an hour.	Aggression Time

But they started increasing it and they decreased it, you know it was just up and down.	Inconsistency
It was all chaos, nobody knew what to do	Chaos They didn't know what to do
so in the end they put him on part time from about 9 months	Part time schooling
from 1 hour to 2 hours to 3 and then they got stuck on 3 hours forever.	Time
I was trying to work,	Trying to work Attempting normality
I had a job then because I'd gone back to work	I had a job
and I kept being called home from work every day, almost every day,	Disruption
sometimes it was like 20 past 9 in the morning	Time
and I'd be on the way to work they phone to say you have to pick him up now.	Extreme Demand Expectations Assumptions
So I had to give up work. . .	Loss No choice
the whole thing was awful, really terrible.	Emotional Impact
He got so stressed	Stress
and the whole year you could see he got really bad dandruff	Physical damage/stress
and his lips were bleeding all the time with stress	
and . . . it was awful, really awful	Emotional Impact
but we kept going and going	Persevered
because they kept saying it might get better.	False hope
They wanted these assessments done,	School requirement
it took all year to get the assessments done because we wanted an EHCP.	Time
But actually at the end of the year things had not got any	No impact

better at all,	False hope
we wanted him to maybe repeat reception	We wanted to try
but they wouldn't let us do that	They said no
so we couldn't do anything else.	No options
We couldn't send him back to school in year 1	No choice
so we've kept him out since then.	Turning point

. . . he just about held on,	
it was awful but he did just finish it at the same time as everyone else instead of taking him out,	
we didn't want him to know we were taking him out because of his behaviour because we thought that might not be good for him to know that if he kicks off . . .	
so he never knew it was because of that. . .	
so he finished at the same time as his friends	
so he noticed a bit less.	
So since then we've just said that school is too difficult for you,	
we'll go back when you're older and it's a bit easier for you	
and you need more time at home so that was that . . .	
it's our second year home-schooling . . .	
so we got an EHCP,	
we made the school apply for it just before the end . . .	
and then we spent the next 10 months trying to get it at home	
and they finally gave it to us just before we moved.	
So we got an EHCP because we wanted to try again,	Hopeful
that was the plan to take a year out and try again	
but with all the support at the beginning	New beginning
but then he was doing so well	Doing well
we just couldn't face going back	Fear Going back
and we were supposed to go back September next year	Good intentions

and we decided not to go back then either,	Choice
maybe the one after [laughter] it keeps getting extended [laughter].	Possibilities
It's a possibility. . . I don't know, I think me and my partner disagree a little bit because I think he's doing so well	Uncertainty
I'd like to keep him out because I think whatever we do I think school will be a disaster again	Fear Damage
and I can't face it. . . it's just so damaging for him.	

. . . not entirely, still when he is stressed it happens with other children,	
so it's not been perfect with home education,	Not perfect
there's still problems but there much more manageable because I'm there all the time . . .	Manageable Presence Control
so I can step in if I see something happening.	I can do something
I can remove him . . .	Choice Control
and in school he was uncontrollable	Uncontrollable
but outside, people think he's maybe a bit rough sometimes,	Not so different Judgements
some of the other kids think he's a bit rough	
but he doesn't really stand out that much, only a little bit	Not so different
and in school he was just off the scale	extreme
but outside he's in social groups,	
we do a lot of activities every day.	
Home education groups, gymnastics and drama groups and like all sorts of things and there he manages ok.	
We've had problems . . .	
so he gets all his socialising	
and he's made brilliant friends	
but the groups are smaller, there's usually only 6, 7, 8 maybe 12 children	
I'm there in the background	Presence

	Control Vigilant
so I can see if he's getting stressed	I know
and if I need to I'll step in and take him out until he's calmed down and put him back in.	Manageable Choice Control I can do something
That's what he needs, he does get stressed, he just needs somebody there with him . . .	Connection Adult support
get him out quickly, recognise the triggers and stuff because it does happen very quick	Know him Awareness Act fast
but I know the kinds of things that will set him off.	I know Understanding
Things like having to follow instructions which is bad for school obviously.	Expectations environment
So the groups that he has to do what he's told all the time, he finds really hard, so like gymnastics they tell him . . .	
I don't know if you know but they have to do line work	
and he's really struggled with that,	
he just flops on the floor and refuses to do anything, gets really stressed.	
And at the beginning I had to take him out a few times	
but now the teacher's got to know him, he's got to know the teacher	
and he still flops around you know falls on the ground when he doesn't want to do things.	
But actually he does it in quite good humour	
and he's not been aggressive, you know he's fine . . .	
it took about 10 weeks before he started relaxing . . .	
knowing what to expect,	
getting to know everybody,	
the teacher knowing him	
but you know just took a long time I think.	

But it was a very controlled group,	
so it was different with a school class of 30,	
you know it's 12 kids a lot of them are quite a bit older, more mature . . .	
you know some of them are younger.	
I think the age mix helps him as well,	
you get a lot of that in home education groups.	
So he's got older kids to look after him	
and he's got younger ones that he can look after,	
you know he responds to that well	
rather than everyone being the same age and competing with each other, which I think doesn't suit him.	

. . . he needs more adult attention . . .	
he needs a lot to feel safe which I didn't realise but he does . . .	
it's smaller groups, I'm there.	
In home education groups they are less strict	Relaxed
so if he doesn't want to do something they won't usually force him to do it	Compromise
they'll either ignore him or let me take him out.	Manageable
But with school there's a lot more pressure to do what he was told.	Pressure Expectations
He's got a lot of control issues like a lot of adopted kids,	Control
I think I've seen it a lot, they don't like being controlled by other people,	
they need to be in control so they don't like always doing what they're told.	
So if stressed the default will be no I'm not doing it. He does that a lot . . .	Refusal Stress
being adopted is part of his experience.	Part of who he is
I think his life was so out of control for a few years.	Out of control
He had four different families and he was only 2 years 9 months but . . . just that a part from anything else . . .	Change Inconsistency

when he was still at home; a lot of fighting and arguing. . .	Threat
all of his experience is pretty uncontrollable	Uncontrollable
and he didn't know what was going to happen to him next.	He didn't know
And he loved his foster carers . . . 21 months he was there.	Relationships Connection
I think he was just getting on all right.	Coping
If he had stayed there he probably would have been all right,	Reflection
it was just that final move that really did him in, I think . . .	Turning point
he's being great now, he's brilliant.	Things are better
He's never been so happy, you can just see,	Happiness
just this year actually, this last six months he's done brilliantly.	Positive Progress time
Finally he's just relaxed	Relaxed
and he really enjoys what he does,	Pressure eased Enjoyment
he's got friends,	Relationships
he feels quite good about himself,	Feels good
you know he always felt awful, because everybody, knew he was a bad one . . .	Felt bad The bad one
you know in the playground all the kids would be saying oh that's the bad one.	Fear
Which I don't blame them because . . . they were scared of him.	
But he doesn't get that now, he's got lots of friends	relationships

School wise but he's been alright since then . . .	
he only ever talks about the lunches, he used to like the lunches [laughter] he still talks about that.	
When he was first taken out, he talked a lot about it,	
said he wanted to go back which surprised us.	
He constantly 'I wanna go back, when can I go back I miss my friends.' . . .	

he didn't have any friends, not really, a few, not good, he didn't, cos of his behaviour,	
he wasn't able to form friendships.	
You know I think he felt a sense of loss,	
he felt he was missing out,	
he did feel a sense of loss about leaving school	
but we knew it was the right thing definitely.	
We knew if he went back, it would be no good.	
But now he doesn't want to go back to school anymore, because he's happy, really happy . . .	
so we do talk about him going back to school,	
and he says things like, 'I want to go back to school but I want it to be a school where I'm the only child', he says it all the time.	
So I think he knows he can't cope if there are too many children around, that's what he says.	
And when he was in school he used to say there was too many children, he says that himself that's what it is. . .	
You know I say, 'there are no schools like that, if you go to school there will be a lot of other children.'	
He doesn't want to go.	
So he says he'll go if he knows someone else in the class, so he'll say, 'can I go to school with one of my friends?'	
We'll have to see. . . I think because I've been doing all of it	
and I've met loads of people who just do it like that,	
they just keep the kids out until they're 14 or if they want to go to college, they can go to college.	
So it's become really normal to me	
when I see it all around me	
and I see that the kids are doing quite well.	
But *partner* has been quite separated from it. . .	
She works full time so I think it's not become so normalised for her.	
I think, she just can't imagine what it will be like to have	

him at home when he's older.	
She thinks it would be too much, trying to teach him. . .	
she just can't imagine it	
but I've seen other people do it	
so I think it would be alright actually	
but she wants him to go back to school	
but we both agree . . . not this September but the one after.	
So that's where we are [laughter]	
we're stretching it out [laughter]	
but you know it's hard for her because she's cut off from it all.	
And I think in a school she'd understand it more	
and would pick him up and be more involved.	
But here it's a separate life, this way it's very separate.	
She doesn't know the people I know,	
she doesn't see what we do	
and I think she feels quite left out I think.	
And also . . . I've had to give up work and we've had to move here because we couldn't afford to live in London anymore,	
it caused us a lot of problems.	

we didn't have the option . . .	No choice
he couldn't go back to school,	Work
even if he went back to school I can't work,	Part time
everybody says it would have to be really reduced hours.	
The educational psychologist said the other day, he recommended if he went back he'd do an hour a day you know if that took a year, then you know . . . it would have to be a year,	Time
so you know that's the worst of both worlds.	Stuck
That's an hour a day I'm tied to the school,	Expectation

I'd have to do what they tell me.	Trapped Controlled
It's involving lots of professionals.	Lots of professionals
You know it's very stressful,	Stress
meetings and people that don't understand.	They don't understand
This way I'm in control of it.	Control
So if he was at school for an hour a day, he'd still be getting behind with his work.	No academic progress
I'd be controlled by them you know,	Controlled
I wouldn't be able to do what I wanted	No choice
and when he was doing part time before he would be stressed after school.	Stress
I couldn't do work with him after school,	No academic progress
you know so that just feels like a horrible option to me.	Inappropriate
So I won't be able to work anyway if he was at school.	Work
We can't use after school clubs because he can't really be looked after by other people very easily.	No childcare No choice
Sometimes, my parents for a short time	
but you know I can't just ask friends to pick him up because he kicks off.	
I don't let him go to other kids houses without me being there because occasionally, not very often there would be an incident	Fear Vigilant My responsibility
and I don't want other parents having to deal with it. . .	Protect him/others
I want to be there and get him out quick.	Presence Action
I don't know if I'll be able to work again either way,	Uncertainty
so . . . what's the incentive to go to school?	No benefit
Not much. . . I don't see what he would gain from being at school, I really don't	

everybody was out of control.	Out of control
Nobody knew what to do . . .	They didn't know what to do
He was out of control,	

I couldn't control it because I wasn't there.	I wasn't there
I felt like it was my responsibility	No control
but I wasn't there you know	My responsibility
and they looked to me like what shall we do	expectation
and I was just like, I don't know, he's not like this at home, so I didn't know.	I didn't know
I wanted them to tell me what to do	Tell me
or you know I thought they'd know what to do but they didn't. . .	They didn't know
Maybe there are better schools definitely,	
it probably wasn't the best school but it wasn't the worst, I don't know.	
I think any school would have really struggled with him definitely, any school unless it was a class of 12 with an extra teaching assistant	
you know but you'd have to pay for private school for that wouldn't you.	
And even that I don't know, they have their small classes, they probably do.	
I think that's what he might cope with,	
that . . . or a special school would be alright,	
but then how do we get hold of a special school?	
It's almost impossible isn't it? He's not got a diagnosis of anything.	
It would take years to get hold of one	
and the process would be so horrible because he would have to fail again at school . . .	
he'd have to go through all that.	
But he'd be alright in a special school	
but is he better at being home educated? Probably,	
at a special school the other kids wouldn't be the same as him,	
they'd be there for different reasons.	
Special school for adopted kids, yes they do exist but	

they're not round here are they.	
There's one in Reading isn't there but what choice do we have?	
They'd understand and there'd be other kids with similar issues.	
I'm sure he would be alright in that kind of school	

I think they should have attachment training,	
that school didn't until four months in and even then just one teacher going on it . . .	
there were too many staff involved.	
In the end, his teacher got sent off for a day,	
that's fine a day but then she was expected to tell everyone else what she'd learned.	
I don't know how well that works, that trickle down training, maybe it does work, it's what people do now send one on training.	

Smaller group, more adults but also he wasn't told what to do all day.	
He can do a bit of following instructions but when it's constantly all day.	
So what went wrong, I think the things they should have changed from the beginning.	
He had a very strict teacher who shouted a lot,	Temperament Shouting
that's especially a big no, no, because when you shout at him he gets into his 'No I'm not!'	Threat Refusal
and that makes him more aggressive, he gets scared so starts fighting.	Fear Aggression
So she shouted a lot, she was known for shouting,	Shouting
I didn't know that until it was too late,	I didn't know

she actually left because a lot of parents complained about her way before the end.	Common perception
It wasn't just *son*, but she was the worst teacher for him ...	Not different
and they asked me in to shadow for a few days in order to support him	Adult support Presence
so I saw a lot of things that were happening that I didn't know.	I didn't know Provision
There was a time out chair in the room,	
the whole school did that, but I didn't know.	
There was a chair that naughty children could sit on in front of everyone and used,	Behaviour management Public shaming
in front of me she did this.	Disregard
I don't know what it was like when I wasn't there.	Not there
He wouldn't take his gloves off	Refusal
so when they came in they had to take their coats and gloves off	Routine Expectation
and he wanted to keep his gloves on and . . . he wouldn't take them off.	
It was a little thing.	A little thing Insignificant Not important
Why didn't she just ignore it and let him keep his gloves on	I don't understand
if it makes him feel better	Empathy Understanding
but he had to go on the time out chair for that.	No choice
Not taking his gloves off.	Not important Expectations
And then they all had to say good morning one by one when she did the register	Expectations Refusal
and he didn't say anything.	Empathy
He didn't used to like saying hello in front of people or anything,	
so he was silent,	

so she put him on the time out chair for that	Punishment
and that was just non-violent things.	Not important Insignificant
So that wasn't great, it made him much worse.	He got worse
So she was constantly making him do lots of things.	Pressure Expectation
There was no leeway for her letting him relax	No compromise
and it was not just leave him, leave his gloves, if he doesn't say anything just let him be quiet.	No empathy

Yeah the teachers thought he was just being naughty on purpose, definitely.	Perception No understanding
She was trying to break his will,	Submission
I think she thought, impose her authority he'd start listening,	Control Different
it works for some other kids I'm sure	
but . . . he was only four and a half, it's horrible thinking about it,	Expectations Age

so [she] had a zero tolerance thing for him and other boys I heard, or just everyone I suppose,	Expectations Behaviour management
that's how she ran her classes,	Control
yeah there's no understanding about . . . refusal to follow instructions might be because he's anxious.	No understanding No empathy
It's a control issue thing,	Control
let him have control over a few things, like keeping his gloves on, that would really have helped	Compromise
but nobody understood that I think in the whole school.	Lonely Nobody understood

just reading I think, we've had lots of assessments,	
I do feel like I understand him and general adoption issues really well now . . .	

we had a really good social worker from our adoption agency,	
we had a psychology assessment, she was really helpful.	
Educational psychologist with the school was absolutely useless I must say.	Nothing to offer
She had nothing to add,	
she just had no suggestions,	
the report was just really vague really, cut and paste,	Vague
it didn't even mention adoption issues.	Impersonal No understanding Not relevant
it was just a complete waste of time,	Time
she had never even met him, she observed him once . . .	No thought
so she didn't even think about it, she didn't put any thought into it.	No care
He's a bit unusual, he's not maybe the usual kind of child educational psychologists need to assess, do you think?	Different
He didn't have any disabilities, because he was slightly different,	
She spent most of the year, first of all refusing to assess, sending it back.	Passing responsibility
And then she used to come to the meetings but she'd say because all these other people are involved, I'm going to take a back seat which is what she did,	
she'd sit there but didn't say anything	Nothing to offer
and only wrote the report in January after he'd left	Time
She didn't want anything to do with it really.	Passing responsibility
Nobody wanted to do anything with it,	
weekly meetings	frequency
and sometimes there were thirteen professionals in the room.	Lots of professionals Passing responsibility
it was too many people.	
Actually everybody wanted somebody else to do something about it.	

it was just a waste of time.	Time Missing the point Not helpful Get to the point
Nothing ever got achieved	
and the meetings would all start 'say something positive about *son*',	
it would take half an hour.	
We didn't want all that,	
we wanted to get to the problem you know say what are we going to do about the problem.	
Just such a waste of time the whole thing. It's just ridiculous. .	
The SENCO didn't say anything,	
educational psychologist didn't want to do it,	
CAMHS, they did the best assessment, they were really good	
it was a one off assessment to see what they thought his issues were.	
They diagnosed him with attachment problems, which we knew anyway	
but they did a really thoughtful, nice assessment.	
That's the best one we had actually.	
Also the clinical psychologist from the adoption agency.	
So we had those reports . . . but they didn't really have an affect. . .	
who else did we have? Oh our social worker was really good, really, really good.	
We got lots of support from her and the adoption agency.	

They diagnosed attachment problems, nobody else did,	
the educational psychologist did not obviously understand attachment problems.	
I don't know whether that is on the normal training . . .	
I don't know what went wrong with her honestly. . .	
so the adoption agency was brilliant,	Support
they would come to the meetings with us,	Advocate

they would be quite stern at times about . . . ‘You can’t be using a time out chair with him, it will make him worse.’	Understanding Sharing knowledge
They gave them information about attachment friendly schools and discipline systems.	
Which in the meetings they say ‘Yes, yes, we understand’	Lip service
but then they wouldn’t put it into practice.	No responsibility
So they say things like, ‘We’ll stop using the time out chair and the red card’, you know the public shaming stuff.	They say things They didn’t do it
So they said they stopped doing it,	
and then *son* would come home and say, ‘I got red cards today.’	
He did and you know they almost denied it happened.	Lack of trust
So they’d say things in meetings that didn’t get filtered down,	Communication
I think it’s because so many people [were] involved.	Too many people
His teaching assistant hated him . . .	Hated him
She was very young, she was like 23 something like that,	Young staff
she just couldn’t cope with him.	Couldn’t manage/cope
And they got someone who was about to retire, she’d been doing it 25 years.	Older staff Experienced staff
But she couldn’t cope with him either.	
We used to hand over to her,	Entrusting our son to them
and she’d be in tears before he’d even started . . .	Emotional impact
‘we don’t know what to do with him, he’s so unpredictable’	They didn’t know
she used to cry because she felt so sad about it I think.	
Nobody was in control.	Nobody was in control
We had one that hated him and one that was crying,	Emotional impact Adult support
everyone else running around not knowing.	They didn’t know
He’d just completely cause chaos in that school. . .	Chaos
he was in control of them all.	Control
he destroyed the school,	Destruction
he was only 4 [laughter],	So small but big impact

Horrible, getting phone calls when I was at work or on the way to work. . .	
come back and pick him up	
and then the clinical psychologist from the adoption agency, when she wrote her report . . . it did change,	Control Action
she said you have to stop doing that because he never knows how long he is going to be there.	Direction
She didn't want him to know his behaviour would mean he would go home immediately.	Behaviourist approach Thinking about son
So she said there should be a rule that he is there for 3 hours. Never less than 3 hours	Direction Rules
and if it's going to increase slowly then it should never go down again. . .	Expectation
slow so he knows what is going on.	
So they did do that, they stuck at the 3 hours but they didn't move it up.	Acted upon advice
So they did do that. I think it was too late by then, it didn't make any difference to the way he behaved,	Too late No impact
so they did stop phoning me after that, about half way through the year.	Turning point Things got better
They wouldn't ask me to come and take him home, which was better.	Challenging
It was better, they just had to do something else with him which you know, they . . . found very hard.	
They didn't know what to do with him for three hours,	They didn't know
it was really hard, even for three hours they couldn't do anything, couldn't manage him. . .	Couldn't manage/cope
yeah, you wouldn't know. If I tell people they can't even see it.	
People just think I'm being an over anxious parent, I think.	

I think people don't know the back ground, so you know, like moving here they don't know anything about his background.	
So I want to warn them a little bit . . .	Warn them
I have to explain why I don't want him going off to their house without me being there.	Justify
So I tell them bits about you know how he's been and stuff.	Not believed
I can just tell they don't believe me	Judgement
or they think I'm being anxious	Acceptance
but it's better than to be thought of as anxious rather than him doing something terrible and they don't want their kids to play with him anymore [laughter],	Fear Safe
I'd rather be a bit cautious.	
I don't want him to hurt other kids because he can really hurt some of them.	Fear Hurting others
When we first moved here, he was stressed,	Stress Change
and he pushed a girl right out of the top of a tree.	Hurting others
And then her mum came to help her and he started hitting the mum and kicking her. . .	Out of control
so I don't want anything like that to happen to people I'm going to try to be friends with [laughter] in the community . . . especially since we've moved.	Image Belonging/ fitting in Community Judgement
After that thing in the playground with the tree, I've been so paranoid. . .	Fear
I have to supervise him.	Vigilant
if nothing happens over a few times, I will relax a bit.	control
At the Home Ed groups all the other parents, a lot of them will drop their kids off and go	Different relaxed
or they will sit chatting to each other	Vigilant
but I'm usually watching [laughter]	
but you can't switch off as much as other people do. . .	

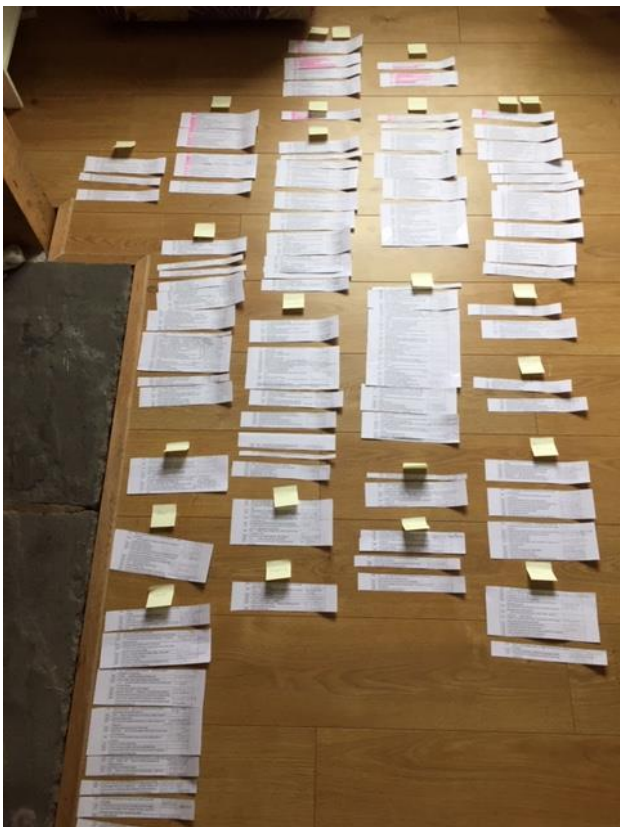
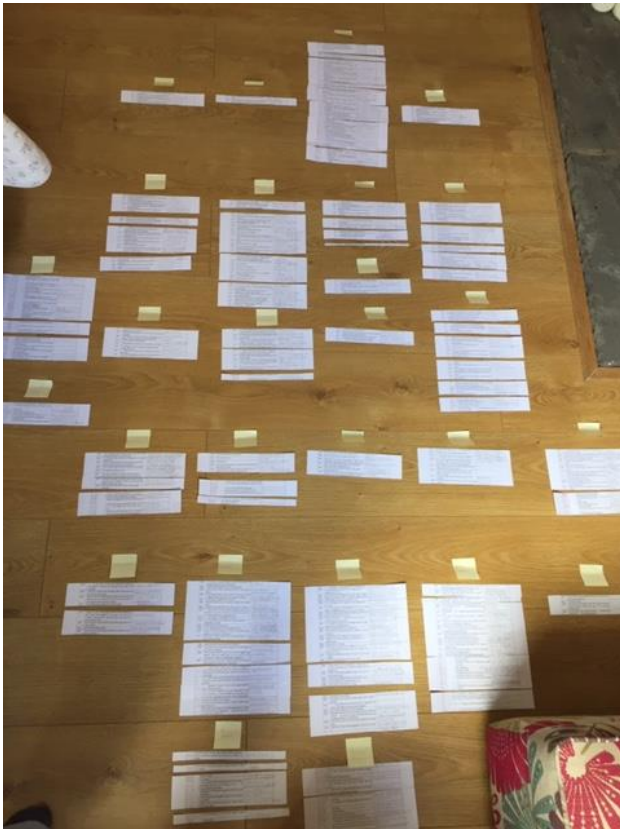
No, we came from *area*.	
I think they know they've made a mess of it, it's not their fault	
but they all knew about him, the whole of the borough knew about him.	
You know the virtual head, we got him involved,	We did it
tried to get people to know we needed help.	Seeking help
I was trying to get him to a special school or something like that but it didn't happen.	I was driving it
So they all knew about him.	Extreme
So when I took him out,	No choice
I made it really clear that I felt we were forced to do this and it wasn't elective.	No provision
They call it elective home education.	
I kept saying, 'it's not, we're doing this because you haven't been able to provide anywhere that can manage him.' Because we couldn't think of anywhere else he could go . . .	
it took ten months but in the end they agreed to give me funding . . .	
we got a lot of money two and a half thousand a term.	
But we didn't get it until just before we moved.	
So we got one payment but it took a long time.	
And that was supposed to fund two days in forest school because there was a place there he could have been for two more days a week.	
And the plan was for me to gradually leave him alone there . . .	
and that was expensive and they agreed to fund that.	
But everything we did, like swimming, the travel, it was quite a lot of money in the end.	
But now we've moved here they want to take it off me [laughter] which I knew they would. . .	
we've been here more than five months	

and they've not given me any money	
and now they're starting to quibble about they shouldn't pay me transport and they shouldn't do this.	
So I haven't got a penny yet.	
We're waiting for that and I think they're just going to try and take it all off me.	
In the end we got a lot of good, financial support from *previous area*	
and they agreed the highest funding level for when he was going to go back to school.	
That took a lot but they did, they were going to give him eighteen thousand pounds extra, which is a lot	
and everybody said he wouldn't get it because he hasn't got a diagnosis.	
But they agreed it in the end.	
But I think here, they'll take it away.	
He'll be assessed and they'll say no he doesn't need it.	
So that means when he goes back to school, will they pay for one to one? They probably won't.	
Or they'll probably just decide he'll go for an hour a day, forever [laughter] because that's cheap.	
I think they will, so that's what's happening,	
I think that's why they sent the educational psychologist round.	
I'm a bit paranoid.	
I think they want to reassess and say he doesn't need what *previous area* thought he needed.	
That educational psychologist seemed really good,	experience
I haven't seen him before	Knowledge
and he was completely different than the other one we had contact with.	Relevant
He was really experienced and don't know if that was just the reason,	Understanding
he'd done loads of reports	

and he seemed to know a lot about attachment,	
he knew about home education,	
he knew a lot about it so maybe he understood the situation, he was really good, really good.	
I haven't seen the report yet [laughter]	Uncertain
but I think he's going to say he's doing well now.	supportive
He was saying to me, you know, 'what do you want me to say' in a way.	
'Are you hoping to get him into school in September or are you not?' . . . so in the end we just said 'no',	
you know there's no point pretending we're going back to school this September.	
He could recognise a lot of the benefits,	
he was saying time out from being traumatised . . . alone . . . is helping his brain to develop.	
Which is true, he was so stressed,	
it was very bad for his brain.	
He was only young,	
he's been out of that because it was a traumatic situation being in school,	
so we moved him from that.	
I don't know what he is missing out on.	
I think he kind of understood that because he knows he goes to lots of social groups,	
he's getting a maths tutor, that's one thing they have done here.	
I didn't ask for that but they gave it which has been brilliant actually.	
So I've got that twice a week,	
he's a little bit behind but he's not too bad,	
so I think he's going to be quite supportive in his report.	
So we'll see what they make of it, when they get it.	
Yeah, he's not going to say he needs to go back to school, I know he's not	

I suppose you don't think it's going to happen to you.	You don't realise Not applicable
You do hear about the worst case scenarios, they tell you a bit in training. . .	Some knowledge
I don't remember them ever saying, be prepared for your child not being able to cope with school.	No warning Significant issue
I don't remember that.	
It's such a big thing, isn't it, for so many.	
They never said to us be prepared that one of you might not be able to go back to work.	
That happens all the time, just from reading the forums.	Common occurrence
So many people say they thought they would go back to work and they couldn't.	unexpected
That's it. You can never go back to work until your child is an adult.	Loss No choice Turning point Life changing
I did go back but I had to leave after three months.	
I went back two days a week.	
and then they said he's only allowed one hour a day from January.	
I still remember finding out at work about that.	
And I couldn't really work after that any more,	

Stage 6: Photographic example of the coded transcript being separated into themes.





Downloaded: 20/06/2019
Approved: 25/05/2018

Jessica Stout
Registration number: 160102442
School of Education
Programme: Doctorate of Educational and Child Psychology

Dear Jessica

PROJECT TITLE: The stories adoptive parents tell of their experiences in the schooling/ education of their child.
APPLICATION: Reference Number 019453

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 25/05/2018 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 019453 (dated 14/05/2018).
- Participant information sheet 1044336 version 1 (14/05/2018).
- Participant consent form 1044256 version 1 (13/05/2018).

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Yours sincerely

David Hyatt
Ethics Administrator
School of Education