An Interpretative Phenomenological Study Exploring Designated Teachers' Experiences of Supporting Looked After Children

---

Danielle Goodall

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

The University of Sheffield

School of Education

May 2014

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to explore Designated Teachers' experiences of supporting Looked After Children. The aim of this was to increase knowledge, awareness and understanding surrounding their unique perspectives in order to gain an insight into how the role can be supported and strengthened to improve outcomes for Looked After Children.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six Designated Teachers working in both primary and secondary schools. The participants were selected purposefully, according to specific sampling criteria, to ensure they were able to reflect upon a range of current experiences. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was adopted as the methodological approach and five superordinate themes emerged from the interpretative analysis. The Designated Teachers emphasised the importance of 'personal commitment and the need for resilience' in order to persevere with their endeavour to support Looked After Children despite numerous barriers. They placed an emphasis on 'recognising the child at the centre' and 'the importance of a holistic approach', suggesting that supporting the educational achievement of Looked After Children is not something that they can do in isolation. The Designated Teachers appeared to be 'working on the margins' and feelings of isolation, apparent invisibility and a lack of control were apparent. They also experienced a significant 'variability in role and support needs', meaning that influential support from external professionals needed to reflect their individual needs and competence levels.

The research findings are discussed in relation to existing literature and psychological theory to aid with understanding. The main conclusions are presented and lead to a number of recommendations for school staff, Local Authority professionals and future research. Underpinning these recommendations is an emphasis on the importance of listening to the views of Designated Teachers.

Contents

List of Tables

Glossary of Terms

APPG: All-Party Parliamentary Group

BPS: British Psychological Society

DCSF: Department for Children, Schools and Families

DfE: Department for Education

DfEE: Department for Education and Employment

DfES: Department for Education and Skills

DoH: Department of Health

DT: Designated Teacher for Looked After Children

EP: Educational Psychologist

IPA: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

LA: Local Authority

LAC: Looked After Children

NICE: National Institute for Health and Care Excellence

PEP: Personal Education Plan

SEN: Special Educational Needs

SEP: Specialist Educational Psychologist for Looked After Children

VH: Virtual School Head

Chapter 1: Introduction

Looked After Children have been identified as being the most vulnerable group of children and young people in our society (Cameron & Maginn, 2011). Their educational achievement has been highlighted as a key national priority and the Designated Teacher for Looked After Children was introduced in order to improve the outcomes for these children and young people (DfES, 2006). The aim of this research is to explore Designated Teachers' thoughts and feelings regarding their experiences of supporting Looked After Children. I acknowledge my active role in the research process and I therefore begin the thesis by discussing my connection to the topic area and my positionality. This is to support the strive for transparency.

Throughout my time working as an Assistant Educational Psychologist and a Trainee Educational Psychologist, I have been particularly interested in supporting vulnerable groups and therefore promoting social justice. I believe that everyone has the right to succeed in education but some children and young people need more support in order to achieve this. I take a keen interest in the support mechanisms available to help disadvantaged children and young people and continuously reflect on my practice with regard to my role in this. During my practice I have been particularly struck by the disheartening outcomes for Looked After Children and I feel that more must be done to narrow the gap between these children and young people and their peers. This commitment is shared by professionals within the Educational Psychology Service and Local Authority in which I am currently working and Looked After Children have been identified as a priority group for support. I believe that through this research I can raise awareness and understanding surrounding the Designated Teacher role, which will hopefully influence practice and therefore the outcomes for Looked After Children.

I think that the motivation to engage with this topic in my professional career has been driven by the association that I have with this area in my personal life. My mother became a foster carer when I was 18 years old, just shortly after I had left to go to University. I therefore have many foster siblings and through this I have gained an insight into the experience of growing up in care. It should be recognised that this understanding is from an 'outsiders' perspective looking in, however I have seen

many children flourish in care and others who I feel have been let down by professionals working within education, health and social care. I also think my mother has been both supported and impeded by a range of professionals over time. I have therefore seen her enjoy some intensively positive experiences, but I have also seen some of the challenges that she faces and how isolating the role of a foster carer can be. My long term partner is also care experienced and he is quite heavily involved in trying to improve the care system through charitable work. Through his work, I feel that I have gained an additional insight into how Looked After Children and Care Leavers view the system and I have also gained an insight into the longer term impacts of being 'looked after' and how the effects of this can progress into adult life.

Due to my personal connection and commitment to the topic area, engaging in reflective and reflexive thinking has been extremely important throughout the research process. This has been supported through discussions with my research supervisor, fieldwork supervisor and peers throughout the process. I have also used a research diary to help explore my thoughts, feelings, interests, values and beliefs in order to bring these to my conscious awareness and therefore consider the possible impact on the research. Extracts from my research diary will be included in reflective boxes at key points to give the reader an insight into these reflections, but a reflective commentary should also be apparent within the main text.

The thesis consists of a number of chapters which cover the following:

- A critical literature review discussing relevant research and psychological theory pertinent to the topic area
- The rationale for the chosen methodology and details regarding the procedures followed
- A presentation and interpretation of the research findings
- A discussion of the findings in relation to key literature and psychological theory
- A presentation of the conclusions, limitations and recommendations for practice and future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to review relevant literature surrounding the area of Looked After Children. I will begin by exploring what it means to be 'looked after' and present some of the outcomes associated with this group of children and young people. I will then focus on the awareness and recognition of the needs of Looked After Children and how these have developed over time. The remainder of the chapter will explore a number of key factors that have been identified as influencing outcomes and key government initiatives aiming to improve the outcomes for Looked After Children. Conclusions regarding the literature review will then be presented and these will lead to a discussion surrounding the aims of this research.

Defining Terminology

The term 'looked after' is given when a child or young person is living away from home and is in the care of a local authority (LA), or provided with accommodation by a LA (DoH, 1989). This can either be as part of a voluntary agreement (section 20) or as the result of a care order (section 31) (DoH, 1989). When a child is 'looked after' the responsibility to safeguard and promote their welfare becomes the duty of the LA (DoH, 1989). Along with this, and as the term suggests, LAs have an implicit duty to 'look after' these children as if they were their own. This has been termed 'corporate parenting' and requires professionals to ensure that all aspects of life, such as care, education and health, are viewed holistically (Bradbury, 2006).

The labels 'Looked After Children', 'Children Looked After' and 'Children in Care' have been used interchangeably to collectively describe children and young people who are 'looked after' by a LA. For the purpose of this research project the term 'Looked After Children' (LAC) will be adopted as it is acknowledged that this is currently used in government policy and legislation. However, this does not imply that these children and young people should be viewed as a homogeneous group,

instead it should be recognised that LAC are individuals with very differing life experiences and a wide range of needs.

The number of LAC appears to be steadily increasing and in March 2013 there were 68,110 LAC living in England (DfE, 2013a). The vast majority of LAC are cared for within a foster placement, leaving a small minority living in residential accommodation or placed for adoption (DfE, 2013a). Over half of LAC are living away from home because they have experienced either abuse or neglect (DfE, 2013a). The next most common reason cited is "family dysfunction" (DfE, 2013a) although this terminology is not expanded upon and therefore remains fairly elusive.

Outcomes for Looked After Children

Cameron and Maginn (2011) argue that LAC are the most vulnerable group in our society today and it has been consistently highlighted that they achieve poorer outcomes than their peers on a range of measures (Dent & Cameron, 2003). DfE (2013b) highlight that LAC are more likely to be identified as having Special Educational Needs (SEN) and achieve poorer attainment levels than their non 'looked after' peers at Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 and GCSE level. Although these group statistics fail to take into account individual children's starting points and therefore the progress that they have made, they are none the less worth noting as Berridge (2012) argues that educational achievement is a good predictor of success in later life. It should be noted that there have been recent improvements in attainment levels for LAC (DfE, 2013b) however, a wide gap still exists between LAC and their non 'looked after' peers.

Although educational attainment has been highlighted as a valuable outcome measure to consider, the importance of focusing on emotional wellbeing and mental health as predictors of success rather than just prioritising attainment outcomes have also been emphasised (Cameron & Maginn, 2011). McAuley and Davis (2009) argue that investigating the mental health needs of LAC has not been given enough consideration, although they do acknowledge that progress has been made in this area. For example, Meltzer et al (2003) carried out a large scale research project

(commissioned by the Department of Health) to examine the mental health and wellbeing of LAC. They found that LAC are over four times more likely than their non 'looked after' peers to be assessed as having mental health needs including hyperactivity, anxiety and depression. DfES (2007) also proposed a stronger focus on monitoring the psychological and emotional health of LAC and DfE (2013b) highlight that all LAs are now required to complete the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997) yearly for each of their LAC. Although this does not appear to be consistently accomplished, the results suggest that over a third of LAC are identified as having mental health difficulties (DfE, 2013b). It should be acknowledged that this tool is only able to provide a snapshot, is open to subjectivity on the part of the foster carer (who is required to complete the questionnaire) and can lead us to assume that difficulties are fixed rather than variable. However, it does suggest that many LAC do indeed have mental health difficulties which need recognising.

DfE (2013b) highlight that LAC are twice as likely to be permanently excluded from school. However, this marginalisation appears to extend past school life and Dent and Cameron (2003) argue that LAC also experience social exclusion later in life. It has been highlighted that the transition into adult life can be a difficult experience and many LAC experience a "downward spiral of rejection" (NICE, 2010, p.9). This manifests itself in many LAC not participating in education, employment or training (DfE, 2013a), a high proportion becoming homeless (Dixon, 2008) and a large number spending time in Young Offender Institutions (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2011).

Recognition and Awareness of the Needs of Looked After Children

The identification that LAC are at a severe disadvantage was first highlighted by researchers in the mid-1960s, however it has been argued that the government and practitioners failed to recognise and act upon these concerns at that time (Harker et al, 2003). McParlin (1996) argued that more needed to be done to raise the profile of the educational needs of LAC and reduce the "second class citizenship" (p. 115) that has been portrayed. McParlin (1996) discussed this apparent marginalisation in very

emotive terms and it should be acknowledged that he himself is care experienced and therefore has a personal connection to the topic area. However, nearly 16 years later Berridge (2012) acknowledges that the educational needs of LAC have been neglected for a very long time and in the past have not been treated as a priority. This appears to be a major concern as it is argued that receiving a good education supports children and young people to lead a fulfilling and enriching life (DfE, 2010). Having a good school experience appears to be particularly important for LAC as school can provide the stability, security and experiences of success that may often be lacking in their lives (DCSF, 2009a).

In the past few decades a vast amount of time and money has been spent on attempting to improve the outcomes for LAC (Coman & Devaney, 2011) and numerous government policy initiatives have been developed to help support this drive (including DoH/DfEE, 2000; DfES, 2006; DCSF/DoH, 2009; NICE, 2010; DCSF, 2010, DfE, 2014). The government appears to have placed an increased emphasis specifically on the education of LAC; The Children Act (DfES, 2004a) made it a duty for LAs to promote the education of LAC and DfES (2006) highlighted the education of LAC as a key national priority for LAs. To support this endeavour, guidance on how school staff should improve the attainment and school experience for LAC has also been developed (DCSF, 2009a; DCSF, 2009b). However, it should be recognised that despite this effort, the outcomes discussed above suggest that LAC still experience dramatically reduced life chances.

The research literature has highlighted that there are a number of factors that influence the outcomes for LAC and the interactions between these factors appear to be complex and multifaceted. There is obviously no single reason for the poorer outcomes in relation to attainment, emotional wellbeing, mental health and future prospects, however a number of key influencing factors will be discussed and explored in depth.

Factors that Influence Outcomes for Looked After Children

Perceptions and Expectations

LAC represent a very small proportion of school populations and it has been argued that school staff may be unaware that they have LAC on their role (Harker et al, 2003). This can lead to staff failing to acknowledge, recognise and respond to the individual needs of LAC (Norwich et al, 2010). Although it is acknowledged that some excellent teachers exist who have the emotional warmth and understanding to help support LAC, it appears discouraging and frustrating to hear that some members of school staff do not thoroughly understand the challenges that LAC face and hold very negative perceptions about them and their ability to succeed in life.

Harker et al (2003) found that many LAC felt that teachers blamed them for being 'looked after' and mistakenly attributed their status to 'delinquent' behaviour on their part. Another study found that LAC felt that teachers had made unfounded assumptions about them, often labelled them as 'bad' children and positioned them as 'trouble makers' who had no interest in succeeding educationally (Barnardo's, 2006). These negative stereotypes appear not only demoralising for LAC as individuals, but also impact on the expectations of others and therefore future prospects (Hare & Bullock, 2006). For example, Francis (2000) argued that some school staff view LAC as academically unable children who do not have the potential to succeed (Francis, 2000). Francis (2000) concludes that having low expectations is an acceptable view and not the cause of underachievement. However, with regard to the cognitive-behavioural perspective, Brooks and Goldstein (2008) argue that teachers' personal thoughts and assumptions influence their interactions and practice, and therefore holding low expectations may result in them not supporting or pushing LAC to realise their potential. It may be that in order for school staff to hold constructive perceptions and expectations, they need to gain a more in-depth understanding of the needs of LAC and the impact early experiences can have on development. This is something that has been acknowledged in recent years and NICE (2010) recommends that teacher training should be developed to incorporate some of these aspects.

The concept of resilience has been discussed and investigated in relation to LAC (for example, Dent & Cameron, 2003; Honey et al, 2011). Although there are varying definitions of this abstract concept, there appears to be a consensus that resilience involves thriving and succeeding despite experiencing adversity (Rutter, 1987). This concept appears particularly pertinent to LAC as many have encountered negative experiences, however many also excel in life. It should be noted that resilience is not a personality trait that people possess, but instead there are a number of influencing and interacting factors which can be located within an individual, within their home system and within the wider community (Masten et al, 1990). The concept of resilience has encouraged researchers to investigate protective factors which can support with an individual's ability to 'bounce back' and this has assisted with the adoption of a positive stance rather than deficit approach (Hanewald, 2011). A number of protective factors such as stability and key relationships will be considered as part of this literature review and it is argued that through the concept of resilience, teachers can be encouraged to adopt a more positive, optimistic and ultimately productive approach to supporting LAC (Dent & Cameron, 2003). This is in opposition to the apparent critical and derogatory discourse that appears to have plagued LAC and reinforced prejudice.

The Importance of Relationships

It is well documented that LAC have a number of needs which pose challenges to foster carers and school staff, some of which may be associated with pre-care experiences (Coman & Devaney, 2011). LAC often experience adverse living conditions before entering care and many have suffered either abuse or neglect (DfE, 2013a). Atwool (2006) argues that the impact of these experiences can best be understood by acknowledging the theory of attachment, developed by Bowlby (1969). Bowlby (1969) stated that through consistent, sensitive and responsive interactions with their caregiver, children are able to develop a secure attachment. This relationship then provides a secure base in which children can explore the world with self-assurance and this facilitates positive functioning in later life (Bowlby, 1969). However, many LAC with negative early life experiences may have had

difficulties forming secure attachments and this may have a long term impact on their relationships, emotional wellbeing and ability to learn (Millward et al, 2006).

Many researchers now argue that attachment patterns are not fixed, stable and therefore deterministic, but instead children and young people are able to form 'healing' attachments later in life through sensitive interactions and responsive relationships with others (Crittenden & Dallos, 2009). This appears to emphasise the key role of the foster carer in supporting LAC to achieve successful outcomes, despite their experience of previous adversity. Oke et al (2013) conducted semi-structured interviews with foster carers in order to explore their views regarding factors that influence placement success. They found that foster carers emphasised the importance of forming an emotional bond with LAC and ensuring that LAC experience a sense of belonging within the family. They also highlighted the importance of having the skills to listen, understand and accept LAC. All these elements appear to be complementary to supporting the formation of secure attachments.

Bomber (2007) argues that school staff also have a great role to play in supporting children with attachment difficulties, highlighting that through the formation of relationships they can act as 'additional' attachment figures. To investigate the barriers and facilitators to successful education Day et al (2012) gave LAC a platform to express their views to a panel of policy makers. This research had the benefits of allowing the LAC to increase their literacy and presentation skills through training and workshops before speaking to the panel. One of the key themes to emerge was the importance of LAC having an emotional connection with teachers who have a thorough understanding of the challenges they face. This has been found in further research (Sugden, 2013) and DfES (2006) also highlights that relationships with school staff are vital to chances of success. It therefore appears that school staff also have a role in supporting LAC to develop 'healing' attachments which can have a long lasting impact.

LAC have identified a number of positive actions of teachers which can facilitate the development of positive relationships and support with educational achievement. For example, teachers can provide additional support with school work and encourage

self-belief (Harker et al, 2003), as well as make allowances when times are hard out of school (Barnardo's, 2006). However, this highlights another predicament for LAC, the one of being made to feel different. The importance of 'normalisation', being treated the same as others and not being made to stand out has been expressed by a number of LAC (Martin & Jackson, 2002; Barnardo's 2006; DfES, 2006). This may therefore invoke a challenge for teachers to ensure that they do not under fulfill their role or over fulfill it.

The Importance of Stability

It has been acknowledged that frequent moves between care placements can have a dramatically negative impact on the ability of LAC to achieve positive outcomes (DfES, 2006). Changes of home placement often lead to school changes, LAC spending time out of education and the breakdown of key relationships (NICE, 2010). It is unsurprising therefore to note that experiencing stability impacts markedly on the outcomes for LAC (Jackson & Cameron, 2012).

The DfES (2006) argue that it is of paramount importance for foster placements to meet the individual needs of LAC, however being a foster carer is not always a straightforward task and can instead be an extremely complex activity (NICE, 2010). Foster carers are often expected to dedicate a vast amount of time, energy and commitment in order for placements to be successful (DfES, 2006), yet many feel unvalued and under-supported themselves (Maclay et al, 2006). It has been recognised that foster carers may need support from professionals in order to promote warm, caring relationships that can reduce placement breakdowns (NICE, 2010). Luke and Banerjee (2012) highlight that out of a group of 10 foster carers, the majority had attended training courses to help them understand the needs of LAC, but this did not appear to be substantial enough and most welcomed more support, information and training.

The concept of home life stability also appears to be linked to the role of the foster carer in emphasising and valuing the importance of education. Martin and Jackson (2002) interviewed a number of successful care leavers who highlighted that it was

of paramount importance to have foster carers show an interest in education and give support and encouragement to do well. Nearly half the sample had significant worries about foster carers being too unconcerned about school achievement and attainment. Harker et al (2003) highlight that foster carers can actually have a negative impact on educational success by failing to attend school events, neglecting to encourage school attendance, failing to ask questions about school progress and not providing enough support with homework.

It does not feel appropriate to take a judgemental and critical stance on this issue and instead an understanding and supportive stance appears more constructive. For example, Comfort (2007) highlights that many foster carers have negative experiences of school themselves and this can act as a deterrent to successful engagement with this system. This researcher also highlights that foster carers can have difficulties understanding how to approach schools to discuss progress and concerns. Comfort (2007) therefore highlights that foster carers may need to learn how to interact constructively with the school system, and it is argued that they may need more support with this, as well as more support understanding the importance of education. Berridge (2012) argues that very little is known about how much emphasis is placed on education during initial foster care training. However, this may be an area that needs improving as NICE (2010) recommends that foster carers receive more training on the education system and how to encourage achievement.

Dilemmas Surrounding Multi-Agency Working

LAC are often supported by a range of professionals from different services including those from health, education and social care. There have been a number of government policies and initiatives created to enforce and emphasise the importance of different agencies working together to promote positive outcomes in a unified manner (DfES, 2004a; DfES, 2004b; DoH/DfEE, 2000). However, Hughes (2006) argues that professionals can have conflicting views regarding what 'working together' implies and how it should look in practice. Hughes (2006) identifies different levels of multi-agency working which range from co-operation (liaising and sharing information) to collaboration (joint case exploration and hypotheses sharing).

It appears that not only can different terms cause confusion, but Coman and Devany (2011) also highlight that working collaboratively at any level can be a significant challenge.

Harker et al (2004) conducted a large scale project investigating multi-agency working and found that a number of challenges exist which can hinder productiveness. It appears that professionals can have conflicting priorities, such as teachers concentrating on performance targets rather than taking a holistic view and social workers focusing on placement needs rather than educational needs. Professionals can also misunderstand the roles and responsibilities of others which can lead to attributing blame when outcomes are not improved. Aspects which appear to facilitate collaboration include strong leadership and commitment from senior members of staff and open channels of communication between professionals. Around the same time as this project was being evaluated, Sloper (2004) identified the same facilitators and barriers while conducting a large scale literature review. It is discouraging to report that Rose (2011) found that years later difficulties with multi-agency working still exist within children's services.

NICE (2010) acknowledge that professionals may need more support in order to embed and improve collaborative working, however working collaboratively with LAC also appears to be an issue. Dent and Cameron (2003) argue that professionals have failed to place an emphasis on the importance of listening to the views of LAC and ensuring these views have influence in decision making processes. NICE (2010) highlight that high performing LAs ensure that LAC are active participants in service design and delivery, however this implicitly implies that some LAs do not give enough weight to voice and influence. When LAC were asked how often their opinions were gained on things that matter, 53% said 'always or usually' and when asked if their views made a difference to decision making, 51% answered 'usually or always' (Ofsted, 2010). This highlights that nearly half of these 1,155 LAC did not have a strong enough voice or enough influence over the choices in their life. Leeson (2007) explored LACs' experiences of participation in a more creative manner by using interviews, games and activities as a method for encouraging children to express their views. The findings suggest that not being involved in decision making can lead to feelings of helplessness and can have a huge impact on future abilities to

make decisions. For this reason alone the importance of ensuring LAC have voice and influence should not be overlooked and it has also been argued that working with children and young people as active participants can support and encourage social justice (Head, 2011).

Government Initiatives to Improve Outcomes

The Role and Responsibilities of the Designated Teacher

In 2000 the government highlighted that "schools should designate a teacher to act as a resource and advocate for children and young people in public care" (DoH/DfEE, 2000, p.33). It was also argued that this role was needed to improve the outcomes for LAC due to the lack of formal arrangements for school staff to work with social care professionals and educational professionals from LAs. Although it was highlighted that this Designated Teacher for LAC (DT) should have an understanding of the difficulties LAC can face, it was left up to schools to decide who this member of staff should be. Fletcher-Campbell et al (2003) undertook a large scale research project in order to evaluate the impact of this guidance. They found that all of the 20 participating schools had a DT who was described as essential to ensuring the needs of LAC were met. However, the effectiveness of the role was dependent on the support received from colleagues and the backing of senior management within the school.

DfES (2006) acknowledged some of these difficulties and also argued that DTs did not always have enough influence within their schools which made it very difficult for them to work effectively at improving outcomes for LAC. For this reason the government felt it was important to strengthen the DT role by putting it on a statutory footing (DfES 2006; DfES 2007). The Children and Young Persons Act (DCSF, 2008) made this a reality and enforced the statutory requirement for all schools to have a DT with the remit of promoting the educational achievement of LAC. Although not explicitly stated, I would argue that educational achievement should be viewed holistically to incorporate not just attainment but also emotional wellbeing, mental health, social relationships and aspirations. This is because

schools and teachers, with the support of multi-agency professionals, can have a great influence on these factors and attainment is therefore a very narrow success criterion.

There is now statutory guidance outlining the role and responsibilities of the DT (DCSF, 2009c). This highlights that the DT should be able to influence a number of the factors discussed above to reduce barriers and promote facilitators to successful outcomes. As part of the school system the DT should promote an ethos of high expectations, help staff understand the needs of LAC as a vulnerable group and as individuals and communicate the importance of publicly not treating them differently from their peers. In addition to this they should ensure that LAC have their views heard and are supported to take responsibility for their own learning. As part of the role, the DT should promote good lines of communication between the school system and the home system. This includes supporting foster carers to understand and place an emphasis on the importance of education. Although not explicitly stated, it could also be expected that the DT ensures that being in contact with school staff is not a daunting process, but a supportive one. The DT is also expected to act as an initial point of contact for external professionals and facilitate the interactions between professionals to encourage successful co-operative working.

Berridge (2012) argues that a vast amount of research has been conducted with professionals from social care regarding successful education, but not enough has been carried out with school staff to elicit their views. This statement appears to be particularly pertinent to the role of the DT for LAC. It is argued that the DT can assist in tackling the issues that exist in schools, homes and multi-agency working in order to promote successful outcomes for LAC and ensure they achieve their full potential. However, despite the belief that these professionals can have a significant influence, there has been little research published regarding the role or DTs' views of fulfilling their responsibilities.

Investigating the Role of the Designated Teacher

Norwich et al (2010) surveyed educational psychologists (EPs) to gain an understanding of their role when working with LAC and part of this involved investigating their views of the DT role. They found that EPs believed that there was a lack of clarity amongst school staff regarding the responsibilities of the DT. However, it could be argued that this research was conducted in a time of change when school staff were still adjusting to their statutory requirements. It should also be acknowledged that investigating the views of EPs surrounding the DT role was not the main purpose of the research and therefore not explored in a vast amount of depth. The research did highlight the role that EPs have in supporting DTs, with many highlighting that they helped DTs to explore aspects of their work through consultation. However, there were a number of EPs who did not know if their schools had a DT and EPs also highlighted that DTs did not always understand the role of the EP or what they can offer.

Driscoll (2011) interviewed a group of care leavers and found that they were not enthusiastic about the idea of having a DT. This was due to the issues of labelling and not wanting to appear different in front of their peers. However, the young people did acknowledge the difficulties of dealing with so many different professionals and the need to have a trusting relationship with one member of staff in school who can support them with this. It therefore appears that the DT role may be viewed as being beneficial by LAC, as long as their views about the difficulties this can bring are acknowledged and acted upon.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers (APPG) (2012) present the findings of an inquiry investigating the educational experiences of LAC. Although they did not gain the views of DTs, they raised concerns surrounding the variability in how the role is performed. They highlighted that DTs must have an interest in LAC in order to succeed in the role and must be given time to fulfil their responsibilities to ensure that they are not viewed as an additional burden. They also echoed the concerns presented by DfES (2006), that DTs must have senior status in order to be effective. Driscoll (2013) interviewed a number of DTs, however the aim was not to investigate DTs' views regarding their

role and responsibilities, but to gain an understanding of the challenges that surround supporting LACs' transition to further education and training. Through the presentation of contextual information regarding the DTs, it became apparent that the vast majority held senior posts within their schools and most had reduced or no teaching demands to compensate.

The Personal Education Plan (PEP) was introduced by the government to raise awareness of the educational needs of LAC, ensure these needs are prioritised and support with appropriate planning to facilitate progress (DoH/DfEE, 2000). Although the social worker is responsible for initiating a PEP (DoH/DfEE, 2000), the responsibility for ensuring the targets set are appropriate and progress is closely monitored rests with the DT (DCSF, 2009c; DCSF, 2010). Hayden (2005) interviewed 10 DTs with the particular aim of gaining an understanding of their views regarding the PEP process. It was concluded that many DTs did not think the PEP supported with promoting more positive outcomes and instead it was viewed as a paper filling exercise. However, the DTs did highlight that the PEP process supported with information sharing between school staff and social workers and this was of paramount importance. Although the main focus of the research surrounded PEPs, it also highlighted that a number of DTs were given the role without being consulted first.

The Virtual School Head (VH) was introduced by the government as another key initiative to help improve the outcomes for LAC (DfES, 2007). Although it has been highlighted that summarising the main responsibilities is a difficult task, the purpose of the VH is to act as a champion for LAC and co-ordinate their support as if they were attending one school (Berridge et al, 2009). This is a strategic position within LAs which involves supporting and challenging school staff, as well as facilitating networks between school staff, social workers and foster carers (DfES, 2006). The VH should also support with guiding the progression of the DT role and providing development opportunities for these professionals (DfES, 2006).

Since the VH role was introduced it has been evaluated by a number of researchers (for example, Berridge et al, 2009; Ofsted, 2012) and the findings suggest that VHs can have a real impact on the educational achievement of LAC. Although not the

main focus of these investigations, both these research teams also made enquiries into DTs' perspectives either through the use of questionnaires (Berridge et al, 2009) or interviews (Ofsted, 2012). The findings suggest that although the DTs were knowledgeable about the needs of LAC, they welcomed further training to enhance their knowledge and abilities (Berridge et al, 2009). DTs also expressed some concerns regarding their relationships with social workers and the lack of communication which was sometimes apparent (Berridge et al, 2009; Ofsted, 2012). However, some good practice was also identified which involved DTs coming together to discuss their role and responsibilities (Ofsted, 2012).

Conclusions and Research Aims

It appears that there is a large gap in knowledge when investigating the importance and impact of the DT role from their perspective. Although a large scale research project was conducted with DTs before the role became statutory (Fletcher-Campbell et al, 2003), since this time researchers have tended to focus on exploring other peoples' views of the role or exploring DTs views of particular aspects of the care system as part of a broader endeavour. It should be noted that even these studies are scarce and there does not appear to be any published research aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of what it is like to be a DT supporting LAC to achieve in education. It is argued that professionals and researchers need to gain an understanding of how DTs think and feel about fulfilling their role in order to gain an understanding of the experiences of DTs. Through this increased understanding, professionals can gain an insight into how best to support and strengthen this role in order to promote successful outcomes and increase the general life chances of LAC. This appears particularly pertinent to the role of the EP, especially specialist educational psychologists for LAC (SEPs), who take the lead on designing projects, providing training and sharing good practice surrounding meeting the needs of LAC (British Psychological Society, 2006). It is also of great relevance to other LA professionals (for example, VHs) who have a statutory responsibility to support and develop the DT role within schools.

The aim of this research is to gain an insight into DTs' thoughts, feelings, perceptions and reflections surrounding their experiences of supporting LAC. This is to increase awareness, knowledge and understanding regarding their unique perspectives. To achieve this, the research will be driven by one broad research question:

How do Designated Teachers make sense of their experiences of supporting Looked After Children?

Reflective Box:

I was shocked at the lack of research in this area, especially considering the government has publicised the role as being key to promoting positive outcomes for LAC. Before conducting the literature review I regarded the DT role as highly important and these thoughts were only reaffirmed when considering the number of factors that they can support with influencing. When I was first discussing my research with others, it was suggested that many DTs may not be fulfilling their responsibilities and may therefore be reluctant to engage in research. However, I was keen not to let these personal views distract from my endeavour to increase understanding as without investigating this area it would remain unclear if these concerns were related to practice. I also thought it was important for DTs to be given a platform to express their views which other people could then process in relation to their own concerns. I think it is important to acknowledge that I am therefore approaching this research with a strong interest in the DT role and a great belief that these professionals can help improve outcomes for LAC. I was conscious that I did not want to approach this from a critical stance and it therefore appeared important to focus on 'how' the DTs felt about their experiences rather than 'what' they were doing in practice.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to address a number of methodological principles. I will start by introducing the research design, including the underpinning epistemological stance and ontological position. I will then introduce the chosen methodology with a number of discussions regarding the theoretical underpinnings, the rationale for selecting this approach, the limitations associated with this approach and the consideration of other approaches. The exact procedures that were followed will then be outlined and discussed in relation to ethical considerations and quality in qualitative research.

Research Design

The purpose of this research is to gain an in-depth understanding of DTs' experiences of supporting LAC. This will involve exploring their thoughts, feelings, perceptions and reflections in order to gain an insight into how they make sense of and understand their experiences. I would argue that the most appropriate way to capture this is to gain detailed personal accounts and this research will therefore be qualitative in nature. I am not approaching this research with predetermined hypotheses to test, but instead one broad research question will form the scaffold of the exploration. The analysis process can therefore be described as an inductive one, driven by the data, rather than a deductive approach, driven by existing theory and literature.

Carter and Little (2007) outline three key concepts which provide the foundations for conducting qualitative research in the social sciences. A researcher's epistemological stance is the first fundamental component which needs to be clarified as this position has a direct impact on the specific approach taken (methodology) which in turn provides justification for the specific techniques used to gather data (method) (Carter & Little, 2007). Epistemology has its roots in philosophy and is concerned with the 'theory of knowledge' (Thomas, 2009). When thinking epistemologically,

researchers should attempt to answer questions such as, 'what is the nature of knowledge?' and 'how is knowledge produced?' (Willig, 2013).

Madill et al (2000) identify three different epistemological positions and argue that instead of these being viewed as distinct and unrelated, it is more appropriate to view them as positions on a continuum. On one end is the realist perspective which assumes that knowledge is pre-existing and the researcher's role is to discover this through an objective and detached approach (Madill et al, 2000). On the other end is the radical constructionist perspective which rejects the notion of any knowledge existing outside of language and argues that knowledge is a social construction (Madill et al, 2000). Between these two extreme poles is the contextual constructionist perspective and as this is the position I will be adopting, it will be discussed in more depth.

Jaeger and Rosnow (1988) argue that it is impossible to view knowledge from a passive bystander perspective (as is assumed by the realist perspective) and instead people take an active role in constructing their understandings. As people are always embedded within a specific context, all knowledge is context bound and therefore perspectival and stand point dependent (Jaeger & Rosnow, 1998). Madill et al (2000) argue that the same phenomena can be understood in different ways depending on the unique perspective of the person and therefore all knowledge is provisional and relative. Through research we can therefore attempt to understand individual points of view but this understanding will always be related to this particular person, in this particular context, at this particular time (Larkin et al, 2006).

Research findings are therefore variable and dependent on the context in which the data is gathered and analysed (Madill et al, 2000). This emphasises the fact that the researcher is also an active contributor in the research process. This is because the researcher is inevitably part of the context and therefore takes an active role in knowledge discovery and construction (Jaeger & Rosnow, 1988). Pidgeon and Henwood (1997) provide a concise summary of the views of contextual constructionists and argue that knowledge production can be influenced by participants' personal understandings, researchers' interpretations and the cultural context in which both understandings are embedded.

Mantzoukas (2004) argues that a researcher's epistemological stance is directly related to their ontological position and therefore this should also be clarified at the outset of the research process. Ontology is specifically concerned with the nature of the world (Thomas, 2009). When thinking ontologically, researchers should attempt to answer questions such as, 'what is there to know?' or 'what is the nature of reality?' (Willig, 2013). A realist position would advocate the belief that there is a single, objective, independent reality and therefore a straightforward relationship between our perception of the world and the 'true' world (Willig, 2013). I am not proposing that through this research I can produce an objective, 'true' account of DTs' experiences of supporting LAC and that this will correspond to an external 'reality'. Instead, I am adopting the belief that I can gain an understanding of how individual participants perceive and interpret this phenomenon from a subjective standpoint. 'Reality' is therefore viewed as relative instead of 'out-there' and this has been labelled as a relativist position (Willig, 2013).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

I am adopting Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a methodological approach in order to explore the in-depth experiences of DTs. IPA was introduced as a specific research methodology due to frustrations regarding the over-emphasis placed on the importance of quantitative approaches in psychological research (Smith, 1996). Smith (1996) argued that a paradigm shift was needed in order to enhance research within the field and therefore deepen psychological knowledge. Smith & Osborn (2008) highlight that the focus of IPA is the in-depth exploration of personal experience and how people perceive, ascribe meaning to and make sense of their experiences. The assumption behind this premise is that people are actively engaged in the world and are constantly reflecting on their experiences in order to understand them (Smith et al, 2009). Researchers adopting IPA as an approach have two main aims. Firstly, they listen intently to the concerns expressed by the participants in order to obtain an insider's perspective of the phenomenon under study and secondly, they attempt to interpret these accounts in order to gain an

understanding of what it means for those people to have those concerns in that particular context (Larkin et al, 2006).

The foundations of IPA are based within philosophy and are informed by three key areas; phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith, 2011). It is argued that it is important to explore these in order to fully understand the focus and aims of IPA, and therefore how it can be used to enhance understanding with regard to DTs' experiences.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is not a unitary body of thought but instead has been developed and adapted by a number of key individuals including Husserl and Heidegger (Langdridge, 2007). Although these contributors may vary in their ideas, they come together in their emphasis on focusing upon 'lived experience'. Phenomenology can therefore be described as a philosophical approach to studying human experience and "the way in which things are perceived as they appear to consciousness" (Landridge, 2007, p.10).

Husserl can be described as the founder of the phenomenological approach and his endeavour has been labelled as 'transcendental phenomenology' (Larkin et al, 2011). Husserl argued that an essential feature of consciousness was 'intentionality'. This means that consciousness is always directed at an object in our world and therefore people are intrinsically related to objects they perceive in the lived world (Giorgi, 1997). This assertion opposes the previously accepted understanding that people and objects are independent and can exist in isolation (Langdridge, 2007). The concept of intentionality helps us direct our attention towards how people perceive objects as they present themselves to consciousness (Langdridge, 2007).

Husserl famously argued that in order to describe and fully understand any given phenomena "we must go back to the 'things themselves'" (Husserl, 1900/70, p.252). This is an important statement as Husserl argued that we often experience the world using the 'natural attitude', which means that we take our experiences for granted, do

not fully focus on them and perceive them with regard to our pre-existing expectations (Smith et al, 2009). However, this way of living prevents objects from showing themselves fully and therefore in order to achieve a deeper understanding we must 'bracket' our presuppositions and preconceptions (also known as 'epoche' and 'phenomenological reduction') (Giorgi, 1997). Husserl thought it was possible to apprehend the 'essence' of any given phenomena in order to identify its essential qualities, structural features and therefore it's underlying meaning (Husserl 1936/70). He argued that these 'essences' or invariable features should transcend any given individual or context and therefore tell us something about the fundamental or universal meaning of a given phenomena (Larkin et al, 2011).

Heidegger (1927/62) provided a critique of Husserl's work and initiated a more existential phenomenological approach. He believed that our engagement with the world was indeed intentional, however he argued that people cannot be meaningfully detached from their context (a world full of people, objects, language and culture) (Smith et al, 2009). Heidegger (1927/62) coined the term 'dasein' to describe how our 'being-in-the-world' is always in relation to other people (also termed relatedness or 'being-with'), situated and perspectival. For these reasons it is argued that people are unable to completely suspend their prior assumptions in order to achieve 'epoche' (Langdridge, 2007) but this can be aimed for through reflective and reflexive awareness (Smith et al, 2009).

Smith et al (2009) argue that through the use of phenomenology we can gain an insight into how to study and understand human experience in its own right. Husserl has highlighted the importance of engaging in reflective and reflexive thinking whilst studying experience and I have adopted a number of strategies to support with this throughout the research process. However, like Heidegger I do not believe that we are able to fully bracket off our prior-knowledge, experience and preconceptions and only attempts can be made to do this. I will not be aiming to capture the universal 'essence' of the experience under study, like Husserl aspired to, but instead I will be aiming to understand personal perceptions and individual experiences. It is acknowledged that studying experience is a complex challenge and the aim is therefore to produce an account which is 'experience close' rather than 'experience far' (Smith, 2011).

Heidegger has informed the idea of locating people within particular contexts and this research will therefore focus on what it is like to experience this particular phenomenon in this particular context. Contextual information can be considered on a number of levels including historical, situational, cultural and personal (Willig, 2013). Key influencing contextual factors therefore appear to include the government agenda to increase outcomes for LAC, the LA context in which the research was completed, the school context in which the DTs are situated and the DTs' personal characteristics.

Hermeneutics

As the name suggests, IPA is an interpretative approach and is therefore informed by hermeneutics, which can be described as the theory of interpretation (Langdridge, 2007). It was developed for the interpretation of biblical texts but the focus has been gradually extended to provide the underpinning for the interpretation of a wider range of texts (Smith et al, 2009). Key contributors in this area include Heidegger, Gadamer, Schleirmacher and Ricoeur. Smith (2007) highlights that although the text that psychological researchers draw on may be slightly different to the original focus of hermeneutics, the ideas are still widely applicable.

Heidegger (1927/62) bridges the gap between phenomenology and hermeneutics through the concept of 'dasein'. He argues that our engagement with the world and our understanding of the meaning of 'the things themselves' is always accessed through interpretation and we inevitably bring our prior experiences, assumptions and preconceptions to the process of interpretation. Heidegger (1927/62) states that "an interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us" (pp. 191/192). Therefore, although our fore-conceptions enable understanding, they can also present as a barrier to the interpretation process where our focus should be on allowing the object of concern to show itself, as it is (Smith et al, 2009).

IPA engages in a double hermeneutic "whereby the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them" (Smith,

2011, p. 10). This is obviously a complex endeavour and therefore requires a high level of involvement and interpretation on the part of the researcher (Smith, 2011). Gadamer (1960/75) states that "the important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text may present itself in all its newness and thus be able to assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings" (p. 238). Gadamer (1960/75) highlights that bracketing needs to be a cyclical process as some of our preconceptions may be obvious to us at the start of our engagement with the text whilst others will only become apparent during the process. This has implications for this research and engaging in reflective and reflexive thinking was an ongoing process which started during the designing process and continued throughout the research process.

Schleirmacher (1998) proposes that interpreting text involves two distinct levels; grammatical (objective textual meaning) and psychological (subjective individuality of the author). He argued that through interpretation we can gain an understanding of the author better than they understand themselves (Smith et al, 2009). This appears to be an ambitious assertion but Smith et al (2009) put this in context by arguing that it is important to conduct an analysis which goes beyond the explicit claims made by participants by looking across cases and later with regard to psychological theory. Gadamer (1960/75) adopted a different belief to Schleirmacher and argued that the primary aim of interpretation is to understand the content of the text rather than the author. IPA appears to focus on both, the understanding of the text but also making sense of the participant (Smith, 2007).

Ricoeur (1970) outlines two different approaches to interpretation, a hermeneutics of empathy and a hermeneutics of suspicion. An approach driven by empathy involves trying to gain an insider's perspective in order to understand the meaning of an experience from a participant's point of view (Smith et al, 2009). This involves engaging with the data and text to gain a better understanding of what is presented (Willig, 2013). An approach driven by suspicion is more explanatory in nature and involves trying to find what may be hidden (Willig, 2013). In order to do this, pre-existing theoretical concepts are adopted and used to guide interpretations (Smith et al, 2009). Claims may therefore be seen as being imposed on the data and this deductive approach does not appear compatible with the approach of this research. Instead, connections to theoretical concepts will be considered after the analysis has

been completed. However, Smith et al (2009) argue that IPA goes beyond an empathetic approach and also incorporates a hermeneutic of 'questioning'. This is because researchers want to 'stand in the shoes' of their participants but also 'stand alongside' them in order to ask questions and make sense of their claims.

The hermeneutic circle is a concept which has a high level of significance to IPA and emphasises the interactive relationship between the part and the whole (Smith, 2007). That is, the meaning of any given part can only be understood in relation to the whole and the meaning of the whole can only be understood in relation to the parts (Smith et al, 2009). This relationship operates on a number of levels (for example, single word versus sentence, sentence versus complete transcription and complete transcription versus the holistic research) and highlights that the process of interpretation in IPA is circular and requires a repeated process of engagement with the text.

Idiography

Smith (2004) criticises popular 'nomothetic' research due to its focus on making generalisable and overarching claims regarding human behaviour. IPA is in contrast to these approaches and is instead ideographic in nature. This means the aim is to focus on personal perspectives and the experiences of particular individuals rather than completely losing these accounts in order to make group level claims (Smith, 2004). Smith et al (2009) highlight that IPA can in fact make a valuable contribution by focusing on single cases, however, most researchers tend to achieve the idiographic element by focusing on the detailed examination of each individual case before moving on to search for convergence and divergence across participant accounts (Smith, 2011). For this research, the idiographic commitment will also be represented in the analysis write up by including transcript extracts for each individual in order to highlight individual experiences.

IPA does not aim to produce results which are generalisable but instead focuses on the potential transferability of findings from one group or context to another (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011). This has been termed 'theoretical

generalisability' and involves encouraging the reader to adopt an active role, drawing on their existing knowledge and experience, in order to judge the applicability of the findings and the possible implications for their own practice (Smith et al, 2009). It is therefore recognised that although the experiences presented are specifically applicable to the DTs under study, these can increase understanding and add to the already existing knowledge and research base.

Rationale for Selecting IPA

IPA has been chosen as the most appropriate methodology for this research project for a number of reasons. Although it has its roots in health psychology, the approach has been increasingly branching out into other areas of psychology, most specifically social, clinical and counselling (Smith, 2004). I would argue that through the use of IPA, researchers can also gain an understanding of experiences within educational contexts and while Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) argue that there is "a conspicuous absence of peer-reviewed educational psychology articles" (p.756) relating to IPA, I do not feel this should act as a deterrent but rather an opportunity. Additionally Reid et al (2005) argue that IPA is a particularly valuable approach to adopt when researching an area that has previously lacked exploration. This seems particularly pertinent to this research as investigations aiming to explore DTs' experiences in-depth appear to be particularly scarce. However, the inductive nature of the approach means that I do not have to rely on existing literature to drive the analysis process and instead the approach will allow for the possibility of novel and unexpected experiences arising.

There appears to be a contentious debate about the epistemological underpinnings of IPA upon which a number of researchers have commented. For example, Larkin et al (2006) highlight that IPA is open to a number of epistemological positions and appear to present this as a strength of the approach. Conversely Chamberlain (2011) argues that this uncertainty can actually act as a barrier to conducting coherent research and pushes for more explicit discussions around this topic. Finally, Smith (2004) argues that IPA is itself a representation of an epistemological position. I would argue that my position of contextual constructionism is extremely

complementary to the aims and philosophical underpinnings of IPA. This is due to the focus on context dependent knowledge (rather than objective knowledge) and the acknowledgement of the active interpretative role of the researcher. Larkin et al (2006) also highlight the complementary nature of this stance to the aims of IPA.

In terms of the analysis process, IPA offers a comprehensive guide to help the researcher to work their way through a number of steps and stages (Smith et al, 2009). Having these guidelines on which to base the analysis appealed to me and this structure provided some reassurance and comfort. However, the emphasis on flexibility and the lack of strict prescription was also attractive and meant that my primary concern was not to complete the analysis in the 'right' way but to adhere to the general principles underpinning the process. The cyclical, interactive process also appeared inviting and seemed to offer something more dynamic than a linear approach, which meant that deep immersion in the data was possible and in fact necessary.

Limitations of IPA

IPA aims to gain an insider's perspective on experience and this is achieved through listening to and analysing the language participants use to describe their experiences. This therefore relies on participants having the ability to articulate, possibly complex, thoughts and feelings. However, Willig (2013) argues that it is in fact a great challenge to communicate the intricate details of experiences, especially when people are not accustomed to talking in such a way. Smith et al (2009) additionally argue that "our interpretations of experience are always shaped, limited and enabled by, language" (p. 194) and this poses another dilemma. Language is in fact limited itself and this may create boundaries to being able to fully share our understandings (Jaeger & Rosnow, 1988), for example, do the words exist to fully communicate individual perceptions comprehensively?

Additional criticisms arise when we consider the role of language and whether it has a descriptive or constructive function. Many methodological approaches (for example, discourse analysis) advocate analysing language in order to understand

how participants are constructing their 'reality'. Willig (2013) therefore argues that, through language, researchers can only gain an understanding of how people talk about their experiences rather than an understanding of the actual experience. However, Smith and Osborn (2008) argue that there is a direct relationship between how people talk about their experiences and their thoughts and feelings surrounding these. The IPA researcher therefore analyses talk to gain an understanding of how participants are making sense of their experiences (Smith, 2011). Even though I acknowledge the critique outlined by Willig (2013), I will be taking the view that through language I can learn something about how the participants are experiencing a certain phenomenon and that they can in part describe their 'reality'.

Another limitation of IPA is that it does not attempt to explain why people experience certain phenomena in certain ways. Instead, it is concerned with describing, exploring and understanding individual perceptions. Willig (2013) argues that this is a potential drawback as the lack of explanation could in fact restrict our understanding of phenomena. Finally, as the researcher has such an active role in the analysis process it has been argued that interpretations are constrained by the researcher's own ability to interpret, reflect and make sense of the data (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). This assertion is potentially concerning for me as a relatively novice researcher, however, I feel that some security is provided by the comprehensive guidelines and discussions regarding the interpretative process (for example, Smith, 2004).

Consideration of Alternative Approaches

Pringle et al (2011) argue that it is important for a research methodology to have a strong theoretical and philosophical underpinning in order to provide a solid sense of vigour and purpose. I would agree with this assertion, however there are a number of highly regarded qualitative methodologies that meet this initial requirement and these will be discussed in relation to this research.

The initial aim of this research was to focus on lived experience, however IPA is only one phenomenological approach which aims to do this and is in fact a relatively

new approach. Langdridge (2007) highlights that 'descriptive phenomenology' was one of the foundational approaches that first attempted to apply phenomenology to research in the human sciences. The methodology, developed by Giorgi, attempts to describe phenomena (rather than interpret) and aims to capture the invariant, underlying structure of an experience (Giorgi, 1992). The approach relies heavily on Husserl's key ideas, such as 'epoche' and 'essences', and less so on Heidegger's developments in the field. This did not appear to be complementary to my research approach as I wanted to fully acknowledge my role in the sense-making process and I did not feel it was possible to fully bracket my preconceptions (even though an effort was made to attempt to do this).

Grounded theory is an approach (with multiple versions) which aims to develop a theoretical account of a particular phenomenon (Smith et al, 2009). It was developed for sociological research (rather than psychological research) in order to increase the understanding of and explain different social processes (Willig, 2013). Investigating social processes appears to emphasise understanding at the group level rather than the individual level and one of the attractions of IPA for me was the idiographic focus. Discourse analysis is another methodology which encompasses a number of different versions, all of which share a common concern with the constructive nature of language (Burr, 2003). Discourse analysis could have been used to investigate how DTs construct their identity through talk, however Smith et al (2009) argue that the most important consideration when deciding on an appropriate methodology is that it is consistent with the epistemological position from which the research is approached. I would argue that discourse analysis is most closely aligned with a radical constructionist perspective, however I felt more comfortable adopting a stance which "recognises the value of the constructionist view, whilst wanting to affirm . . . experiential meaning-making as a useful mode of understanding" (Larkin et al, 2011, p. 327).

Procedures

This research was conducted within one LA. See Appendix 1 for contextual information regarding the LA, the outcomes achieved by children 'looked after' by this LA and the support available for DTs.

Pilot Study

A two stage pilot study was conducted in order to gather information to inform decisions regarding the research. The first stage involved conducting a small focus group with one secondary school DT and two primary school DTs. The main aims of this were to gain a better understanding of what DTs do in practice, to familiarise myself with how they talk about their practice and to identify key experiences which appeared significant. This helped to develop a more in-depth understanding of the topic area or as Smith et al (2009) highlight, a "certain level of cultural competence... in order to properly understand our participants' terms of reference" (p. 195). The focus group also gave me an insight into the types of questions that elicit experiential data and the difficulties of ensuring questions are open and non-leading. From this I became more aware of the importance of having appropriate prompts and probes to help frame questions.

The response rate to participate in the focus group was lower than I had expected and for this reason I decided to approach a larger number of DTs to take part in the main study. I intended to include DTs from both primary and secondary schools in the sample and treat this as a homogeneous group. This is because the statutory guidelines do not differentiate between the role in primary and secondary schools (DCSF, 2009c), professionals in both settings work with the same environmental systems and I was conscious that I did not want to restrict the potential sample population. This intention was reaffirmed through the focus group discussion where it became apparent that both primary DTs had no more in common with regard to their experiences than did the primary and secondary DTs.

The method adopted for data collection was semi-structured interviewing and the reasons for this are highlighted later. The second phase of the pilot study involved

conducting a semi-structured interview with one DT. This gave me the opportunity to pilot my interview schedule and also my interview technique. One main development to arise from this was to include additional probes that were less general and more related to the topic under study (for example, how does that relate to the work you do to support LAC?). It was useful to reflect on the interview process with the DT and encouraging to hear that he did not think any of the questions were too sensitive. I found the balance between active listening and remembering pertinent topics to revisit quite challenging. For this reason, the need to make accessible notes to facilitate this was highlighted for future interviews. Through transcribing the interview I also realised that I made too many verbal utterances that could have possibly been construed as leading (for example, 'right' and 'makes sense'). This was an important reflection and learning point for the actual interviews. Finally, I analysed a section of this interview using IPA in order to practise and become more familiar with the process. Through this I achieved a better insight into how complex, challenging and time consuming the analysis can be which helped me to think about appropriate time scales for completing the analysis.

Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted with regard to the Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2010) and was granted ethical approval by the University of Sheffield's School of Education Ethics Review Panel (see Appendix 2). Ensuring that the research process was underpinned by a respectful and trustworthy approach was of paramount importance during design and implementation, and particular regard was paid to ensuring consent, confidentiality and the reduction of potential for harm.

All of the DTs had the necessary competence to give consent to participate and they were fully and truthfully informed about all aspects of the research through the use of a Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix 3). The DTs were given time to process and reflect on this information before agreeing to participate. Written consent was obtained before each interview began and as part of this process DTs had to indicate that they had read the Participant Information Sheet, understood that their participation was voluntary and understood that their responses would be

anonymised (see Appendix 4). They were also given the opportunity to ask any additional questions before agreeing to take part. Although written consent was obtained at a one off time, ensuring continual consent was an ongoing process which involved remaining sensitive to the participants' verbal and non-verbal behaviour. DTs were informed on the Participant Information Sheet that they were free to withdraw at any time without explanation and this was emphasised before the start of each interview.

Personal information that could identify the DTs remained strictly confidential and I was the only person who had access to this information. The data collected was handled in an anonymous form and this involved giving individual DTs a number instead of using their name or initials. The DTs were informed that the interviews would be audio-recorded to aid with analysis and that the audio recordings and transcriptions would be securely stored and then destroyed after I had successfully completed my course. Whilst transcribing the interviews, personal information was removed and replaced with the word 'name' or 'school', for example. Information contained within the Participation Information Sheet and the consent form ensured that the DTs were aware of what I intended to do with the data after it had been anonymised and informed them of the steps that I was taking to ensure confidentiality.

There may have been a minimal potential for psychological harm, distress or discomfort to arise during or after the interviews. For example, it was possible that DTs might have felt a level of stress regarding the time taken to participate, they may have experienced feelings of guilt if they thought they could have been fulfilling the role more effectively, they could have felt upset when thinking about the life experiences of LAC and they could have felt worried after the interview about disclosing some of their personal experiences. To minimise this potential, the DTs were told in advance how long the interview should take, given the option of when and where they would like the interview to take place, assured that the research was aiming to increase understanding not focusing on judging or criticising, and were encouraged to adopt a high level of control regarding the direction of the interview discussion. An oral debriefing process was also adopted in order to give the

participants a space to talk openly, reflect upon the interview process, ask any questions, discuss any concerns and outline additional sources of support.

Although it is recognised that the potential for psychological harm did exist, it should be acknowledged that DTs are required to talk about their practice and the effectiveness of their role with colleagues, LA professionals and school governors as part of their statutory responsibilities. It is also important to recognise that along with the potential for harm there was also the potential for DTs to enjoy the experience of being listened to and sharing their views.

Sample

Smith et al (2009) highlight that when adopting IPA, researchers should attempt to recruit a fairly homogenous sample, for example, a group of people that do not vary significantly in relation to demographic characteristics. However, I would argue that the topic of this research is quite specific and therefore the potential sample population is relatively small. It has been acknowledged that when this is the case, homogeneity is achieved by sampling a group of people who share and can therefore offer insight into a particular experience (Smith et al, 2009; Langdridge, 2007). As discussed above, I will be treating DTs from both primary and secondary schools as a homogeneous group who share the experience of having the responsibility of supporting LAC achieve in education.

The method of sampling was purposeful in order to recruit participants who share this particular experience and a number of stages were involved in the sample selection. Firstly, I gained access to a list of all the schools within the LA who had a least one LAC on roll. This was to ensure that I was able to speak to DTs who had up-to-date and current experiences of supporting LAC. From this list I removed people who had participated in the pilot study, schools that I was allocated to for my EP practice and people who had highlighted that they would be unable to take part when invited to participate in the pilot study. I then spoke to the LA Education Welfare Officer for LAC in order to identify which remaining people would meet the criteria to participate. The criteria were as follows:

- The DT should have been fulfilling the role for at least one year. This was to ensure that they had a range of experience to reflect upon.
- The school should have had at least one LAC on roll for at least a year. Again, this was to ensure that the DT had experience of supporting LAC.
- The school should only have one named DT. Although this is stated in the statutory guidance, a number of schools had two named DTs and I thought that their experiences may be different depending on which tasks they fulfilled or delegated.

After accounting for these criteria, 14 DTs remained in the potential sample population. These were then discussed with the EPs within the LA to explore if anyone who met the criteria had been missed, however, I was not informed of anyone else who met the criteria. I then contacted all 14 DTs with information about the research, including the Participant Information Sheet. The potential participants were told that I would be unable to interview everyone and therefore priority would be given to the people who identified an interest first. In practice, I interviewed everyone who expressed an interest and agreed to take part.

Reid et al (2005) argue that "IPA challenges the traditional linear relationship between 'number of participants' and value of research" (p. 22) and Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez (2011) add to this argument that "more is not always more" (p. 756). As IPA is idiographic in nature, small sample sizes appear to be more appropriate as they allow for the in-depth analysis of individual cases and experiences. Smith et al (2009) highlight that students undertaking professional doctorates usually engage in four to 10 interviews and for this reason my sample size of six appears to be appropriate to the aims of the study. Table one details information regarding each of the DTs to assist with contextualising the sample (see Appendix 5 for further information).

Table 1: Information regarding the Designated Teachers

	DT 1	DT 2	DT 3	DT 4	DT 5	DT 6
Type of School	Secondary	Secondary	Primary	Primary	Primary	Primary
Number of pupils on roll	1630	900	420	230	390	210
Number of LAC on roll	7	22	1	3	4	11
Time fulfilled DT role	10-12 years	10 years	3 years	3 years	9 years	2 years
Additional roles	Assistant Head Teacher	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator	Head Teacher	Head Teacher	Co-Head Teacher
Sex	Male	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female
Ethnicity	White British	White British	White British	White British	White British	White British

Method of Data Collection

Smith et al (2009) suggest that IPA is best suited to a data collection method that will "invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first-person account of their experiences" and "facilitate the elicitation of stories, thoughts and feelings about the target phenomenon" (p. 56). Semi-structured interviewing appears to be the most widely adopted method for IPA researchers (Reid et al, 2005) and this was the method used for this research. I felt that this would offer the idiographic element that I wanted (as opposed to a focus group) but also a supportive scaffold for myself (as opposed to un-structured interviews). The strength of semi-structured interviews is that they allow participants to speak freely and openly about topics which they feel are pertinent, whilst also ensuring that areas relevant to the research question are covered (Smith et al, 2009). This is aptly defined as a "conversation with a purpose" (Smith et al, 2009, p. 57). Kvale (2007) argues that the term 'interview' suggests that two people are exchanging views and although I do not feel that my views were put forward, I do acknowledge my role in shaping the conversation through the

questions asked. However, I was conscious not to share my personal connection with the topic area as I did not want this to influence the views expressed by the DTs.

An interview schedule was devised as a flexible tool to help guide the discussions in the interviews (see Appendix 6). The schedule was created with the broad area of supporting LAC in mind whilst also thinking about a range of topics which might be pertinent to the experience of doing this. Through devising the schedule I was able to think about how certain questions might be phrased and sequenced, for example more descriptive questions were at the start to help set the scene and more sensitive questions were saved until participants had become more comfortable with talking. Additional prompting and probing questions were devised to encourage participants to talk in more depth and elaborate on points further.

> *Reflective Box:*
>
> The interview schedule was developed, refined and updated through reflecting with my supervisor and colleagues, and through the use of the pilot study. The schedule therefore underwent considerable re-drafting throughout these processes. This progression was extremely important as I think that the first drafts were influenced by my views regarding what the DTs should be doing (for example, their experiences of working with foster carers and professionals from outside agencies). However, the final draft did not make any assumptions about what the DTs were doing in practice and instead invited them to discuss this as they wished.

The schedule was not followed rigidly and so not all questions were asked in each interview, nor were they always asked in the same order. Instead, participants were encouraged to take the lead in influencing the direction of the discussions and concerns that seemed important to their unique experiences were explored further. Questions on the schedule were learned in advance to try to emphasis the lack of a pre-set agenda and therefore an open approach. The length of the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to one hour and five minutes. After each interview I reflected on both the relationship between myself and the participant to aid with contextualising the analysis and my interview technique to support with my development of these skills (see Appendix 7). All the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed to aid with analysis. Although IPA focuses on the content of talk and therefore all

prosodic aspects do not need to be transcribed (Smith et al, 2009), I did make a note of significant pauses and non-verbal utterances (for example, laughing) to aid with interpretation.

Analysis

Smith et al (2009) outline a number of stages involved in data analysis and these were used flexibly to help guide the process. The developing analysis involved moving from a focus on the individual to a more shared understanding and from a descriptive level to a more interpretative one (Smith et al, 2009). Please see table two for a description of the stages involved (adapted from Smith et al, 2009), but it should be acknowledged that the analysis was in fact a cyclical process, rather than a linear one. It was also approached with the hermeneutic circle in mind in order to understand part-whole relationships.

Table 2: Stages Involved in the Analysis

Stage	Activity
1: Reading and re-reading	The process started with the close examination of one transcript. Whilst reading this I listened again to the audio-recording in order to really hear the experiences shared. Recollections of the interview and initial comments were noted in an attempt to bracket these and focus on what was being said.
2: Exploratory commenting	This stage involved initial noting to examine the content on a very exploratory level. It involved documenting topics of apparent importance and trying to capture the meaning of these. The exploratory comments were divided into three key

	areas:
	Descriptive comments- focusing on content and describing the objects of concern
	Linguistic comments- reflecting on the specific use of language
	Conceptual comments- asking questions of the data and moving towards a more conceptual understanding of what it means to have these concerns in this context.
3: Developing emergent themes	The aim of this stage was to focus on discrete chunks of text in order to recall what was learned through exploratory commenting. Concise statements (emergent themes) were developed to capture and reflect understanding. See Appendix 8 for an example of exploratory commenting and emergent themes for DT one.
4: Searching for connections across themes	This stage introduced structure into the analysis. Emergent themes were drawn together by identifying common links between them using the concepts of abstraction (similar themes brought together), subsumption (emergent theme becomes subordinate theme), numeration (frequency in which theme is supported signifies importance) and function (what function it serves). This produced a number of subordinate themes with related emergent themes. See Appendix 9 for examples from DT one.

5: Moving to the next case	The remaining transcripts were then analysed using stages 1-4. Each case was approached in its own right to allow new themes to be developed.
6: Looking for patterns across cases	This stage involved searching for connections across cases. Through this process individual emergent and subordinate themes were relabelled and reconfigured. Subordinate themes that were not recurrent in at least half of the transcripts were discarded. The subordinate themes were drawn together and this resulted in a number of superordinate themes for the group each with a number of related subordinate themes (see Appendix 10).

Reflective Box:

Although there was a lack of research investigating DTs' experiences, my understanding of the topic area was increased through undertaking the literature review. My preconceptions were therefore undoubtedly changed through this process, however I was mindful not to return to the literature or remind myself of this during the analysis process. I tried to preserve an orientation towards openness and ensure that my interpretations were grounded in the data rather than imported onto it. I found that repeated listening of the audio-recordings, repeated reading of the transcripts and leaving time between analysing different transcripts supported with this. I tried to approach each new transcript as if it was the first, however I automatically began making links as I went along. Being conscious of this facilitated with new experiences and understandings emerging. Even after reflecting on the time it takes to analyse data using IPA as part of the pilot study, I think I was still unprepared for how time-consuming and all-encompassing it would be. I found the process both enjoyable and interesting, but I was also concerned about losing the depth of the experiences, particularly when moving from exploratory commenting to

developing emergent themes. I found it quite difficult to develop statements which were both concise and also captured understanding, and I think this is partly why the process took so long.

Quality in Qualitative Research

The terms reliability and validity are often used to evaluate the value of research. However, it is argued that these criteria are essentially related to a positivist, or realist, perspective of how we should view reality and knowledge (Willig, 2013). For this reason terms such as credibility, quality and trustworthiness have increasingly been adopted by qualitative researchers in order to assess value (Golafshani, 2003). Although it has been acknowledged that there is still considerable variability in how these concepts are actually realised in practice (Roulston, 2010), a number of flexible guidelines have been developed to provide a supporting scaffold (for example, Tracy, 2010; Yardly, 2000; Elliott et al, 1999). These guidelines are intended to be applicable to all qualitative research, regardless of the specific methodology adopted, however Smith (2011) has also produced criteria specifically for assessing the quality of IPA research. I have reflected upon the key ideas proposed by all of these researchers and the main implications for this research will be discussed below.

Yardly (2000) argues that one way to facilitate credibility is to show sensitivity to the context in which the study was conducted however, this can be achieved on a number of levels. Firstly, I ensured that I was aware of the wider context in which the research was situated. This involved familiarising myself with the extant literature on LAC and the DT role, and immersing myself in literature relating to the theoretical underpinnings of IPA. Elliott et al (1999) argue that it is also important to consider the more specific context with regard to the participants under study and for this reason information regarding the LA and the DTs interviewed has been outlined. This felt like an important step to help support with the aim of theoretical generalisation. IPA was adopted as an inductive approach and I think that this emphasises that sensitivity to the data was an underpinning of this research. However, Smith et al (2009) argue that it is not only important to ground the claims in the data, but also present this data to the reader to allow them to reflect on the

interpretations and possible alternatives. For this reason, I will be including verbatim extracts and quotations within the analysis section.

Another context that appeared appropriate to reflect upon with regard to this research was the context of the actual semi-structured interviews. Before each interview started I spent time building rapport, through informal discussions, in order to put the DTs at ease and help them to feel more comfortable. I was also aware of the potential power imbalance between myself as a researcher and the DTs being interviewed. For this reason I emphasised the semi-structured nature of the process, the fact that there was no right or wrong answers and that I was interested in hearing what they thought was relevant and important to their personal experiences. I hoped that this would give them some sense of power over the situation and the direction of the discussion. Throughout the interview I aimed to listen with a high level of interest and adopt a sensitive and empathetic approach. This involved observing the participants' verbal and non-verbal behaviour to ensure that lines of enquiry that they did not appear comfortable with were not pursued.

Yardly (2000) argues that another characteristic of valuable research involves approaching the process with commitment and rigour, and this involves engaging with the topic under investigation for a prolonged period. Undertaking a two stage pilot study and spending a prolonged period reading around the conducting of high quality interviews and analysing data using IPA supported with this. Tracy (2010) argues that rigour can also be demonstrated by selecting a sample that is appropriate to achieving the aims of the research. As discussed in the procedures section, the homogeneity of the sample was in line with that expected in IPA research. Finally, Smith (2011) argues that the analysis undertaken should be thorough and interpretative, identifying the prevalence of each theme and showing extracts from a range of participants. I have attempted to achieve this throughout the analysis and write up stages.

Yardly (2000) highlighted that another quality of good research is transparency and coherence. I hope that through discussions in this methodology chapter the reader is able to see an appropriate fit between the research question and the methodology selected. I have also tried to be transparent about the procedures by including

information about how the interview schedule was constructed, how the participants were selected, how the interviews were conducted and how the resulting data was analysed. I have also included transcript extracts in the findings section to allow the reader to reflect on my interpretations and consider possible alternatives.

It is argued that the trustworthiness of a research project can be increased through credibility checks (Elliott et al, 1999) or audits (Smith et al, 2009). This was a process that was adopted during this project and involved my supervisor and peers looking through materials (such as the interview schedule) and the data at different stages of the analysis process. The aim of this was to support with reflective and reflexive thinking and also to ensure that the final report produced was a credible one.

> *Reflective Box:*
> When designing the study I had considered including a stage of 'member checking' which would involve taking my analysis back to the participants to gain their views. However, after much thought I decided that this was not particularly complementary to my methodological approach. This is because I recognise that knowledge is context dependent and therefore acknowledging an evolving relationship between myself and the participants and the influence of this on the data produced could have been quite complex. I also wanted to remain committed to an inductive approach and felt that returning to the participants with my interpretations or specific quotes to expand upon may have led to an analysis that was driven more by my concerns. Additionally, I was concerned that a higher level of time commitment on the part of the participants might have resulted in less people agreeing to participate.

Transparency also appears to be characterised by self-reflexivity (Tracy, 2010) and owning one's perspective (Elliott et al, 1999). It has been acknowledged that I have taken an active interpretative role throughout the research process and my positionality has therefore been identified in the introduction and my research diary has supported with the cyclical process of reflection and reflexion. I have included some extracts from this diary in order to support the reader with understanding my thoughts and feelings and the influence of these on my actions.

Finally, Yardly (2000) suggests that a final feature of good qualitative research is that it has a sense of importance and impact. Tracy (2010) highlights that this begins with selecting a worthy topic. I would argue that as LAC have been identified as one of the most vulnerable groups in our society, anything that could support with increasing understanding as to how outcomes could be improved, is indeed worthy for practitioners and policy makers alike. It is hoped that this research will be interesting and enlighten a previously shaded phenomenon. It is also hoped that this research will encourage people to reflect on possible implications for their own practice and inspire future researchers to continue with investigations in this area.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a phenomenological and interpretative narrative of the research findings. Five superordinate themes emerged from the interpretative analysis and these were shared by all six DTs: 'personal commitment and the need for resilience', 'recognising the child at the centre', 'the importance of a holistic approach', 'working on the margins' and 'variability in role and support needs'. Each superordinate theme has a number of related subordinate themes and these are presented in table three.

Table 3: Superordinate Themes and Related Subordinate Themes

Superordinate Theme	Subordinate Theme
Personal commitment and the need for resilience	Recognising vulnerability Spinning plates Emotional investment Jumping through hoops
Recognising the child at the centre	Levels of participation Battling with the label
The importance of a holistic approach	Laying the foundations Lightening the load Constructing the jigsaw Travelling the distance
Working on the margins	Detached DT community Working undercover The forgotten role
Variability in role and support needs	Developing competence Relevant and available support The lack of consistency

The superordinate and subordinate themes will be presented and discussed in turn. Tables have been included to provide a visual representation of the prevalence of subordinate themes across DTs. Although themes have been separated during the analysis process, many of them are related and this is apparent throughout the narrative account. It is therefore important to consider each theme in relation to the holistic experience and the hermeneutic circle. Transcript extracts in the form of

quotations will be included in order to present the phenomenological core from which my interpretations have developed. Text which is underlined signifies that words have been replaced to ensure anonymity. I have aimed to sample the quotes proportionally across participants so that individual voices can be heard and individual experiences can be illuminated. Extracts from at least half the participants who related to each subordinate theme will be included to support the claims made (Smith, 2011). Throughout the narrative I have aimed to explore both depth and breadth, whilst also highlighting both shared and distinct experiences, therefore capturing convergence and divergence between experiences.

Personal Commitment and the Need for Resilience

This superordinate theme captures the importance of DTs being driven, committed and motivated to helping support LAC achieve in education. However, this endeavour is apparently impeded by a number of barriers and challenges which confront the DTs. They therefore appear to need to demonstrate a certain level of resilience in order to persevere. See table four for the related subordinate themes and the prevalence of these across DTs.

Table 4: Subordinate Themes Relating to Superordinate Theme 1

Subordinate Theme	DT one	DT two	DT three	DT four	DT five	DT six
Recognising vulnerability	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Spinning plates	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Emotional investment		✓	✓	✓		✓
Jumping through hoops	✓	✓			✓	✓

Recognising Vulnerability

Five of the DTs highlighted the complexity of their role by emphasising the demanding nature of supporting LAC. They identified LAC as having SEN and described them as "fragile and on the edge" (DT two, lines 231-232), "challenging" (DT three, line 661), "mixed up" (DT four, line 149) and "disturbed" (DT six, line 618). Through their descriptions it appears that the DTs recognise that LAC need additional support in school and the apparent vulnerability appears to act as a motivator to DTs' engagement with the role. However, there is the sense that promoting positive outcomes is not an easy feat and the struggle was readily apparent.

There appear to be many barriers to overcome, particularly with regard to the previous experiences of LAC:

> *We see a, these children as er obviously starting from, with a disadvantage* (DT four, lines 42-43)

> *She had been taken into care when she was about 10 and had missed a huge gap in all those things you take for granted with children* (DT two, 474-476)

The DTs appear to position LAC as different from other pupils and lacking in some way. This appears to convey the need for school staff to work with extra effort in order to compensate for missed or difficult previous life experiences. However, difficulties were not just viewed in terms of the past, but also the present and the future:

> *The rest of her friends do know she's in care er and, and have seen the tragedy of that as well as losing her foster father* (DT one, lines 798-800)

> *The impact that them being in care is going to have on their schooling right through school* (DT two, lines 855-857)

DT one appears to indicate that simply being LAC can involve great suffering which is perhaps comparable to the suffering caused by the death of a loved one. This again highlights the drive and involvement needed to help LAC through ongoing pain and distress which, as DT two highlights, is potentially enduring.

Although LAC were regarded as a homogeneous group when considering their overall needs, the DTs recognised that they were unique individuals:

> *They're all different, they're all very different* (DT three, lines 649)

> *Some of them are more resilient than others, some of them are much more resilient* (DT two, lines 940-942)

This appears to suggest that DTs need to be flexible and tailored in their approach as some LAC are more able to thrive in the face of adversity.

Reflective Box:

I was slightly apprehensive when I first noticed this theme emerging across cases. I was conscious that I did not want to pathologise LAC and I therefore did not ask any questions specifically regarding DTs' views of LAC. However, it soon became apparent that sharing this information was important for the DTs and was therefore needed in order to understand their experiences.

Spinning Plates

Five of the DTs emphasised the substantial amount of time the role requires and a number experienced discomfort with regard to balancing this with their other responsibilities:

> *Looked after children are important of course they are, but I've got to stack it on the 18 other projects that I've got on the shelf and it's er it's you know the scenario with the plate spinner yeah in the circus* (DT one, lines 910-914)

DT one not only conveys the frenetic pace of this balancing act, but he also gives the impression that he is working with high levels of anxiety due to the irreparable damage that could be done if a plate was to be neglected and fall.

Two DTs experienced conflicting thoughts regarding having the time to be physically and emotionally available for others, although it should be noted that DT two was the only one who had regular one-to-one contact with LAC and DT six was therefore referring to a birth parent:

> *She knows I'm going to be here so... there's a lot of that, an awful lot of that [laughs] but it's great but it takes a lot of time* (DT two, lines 99-103)

> *At the time [laughs] cause this week's so busy part of me terribly was thinking I don't think I can spare two hours for this [laughs]* (DT six, 142-144)

Both DTs were heard laughing even though they did not actually appear to find it amusing and this may suggest how difficult it can be working with incongruence and possible feelings of guilt regarding availability.

Different DTs appeared to manage the workload in different ways and adopted different coping mechanisms in order to do this. DT four appeared able to forget about her other responsibilities:

> *As head I've got the time to be able to go you know if there's a meeting at 1.30 it means that I can drop everything and go* (lines 32-34)

The use of the word "drop" again seems to signify things falling, but she does not appear to be worried about the repercussions of this and attributes this to her role as head teacher. DT one conveys a different approach:

> *I'm not that divorced but before it was all hands on through me and it was a bottle neck. Now it's more diverse within the school* (lines 256-258)

In order to deal with his workload anxieties he has distanced himself and delegated key tasks to others. He appears to justify this decision by emphasising that his ability to support LAC was being limited by his own capacity and things therefore needed to change.

DT five introduces the concept of prioritising when reflecting on the DT role:

> *We have lots of children with emotional needs er some very extreme emotional and behavioural needs so actually they're the families... who take up more of that managing time* (lines 283-286)

Her perceptions of where her time is best spent may be related to her not recognising LAC as vulnerable and therefore other responsibilities take precedence without the need to worry at all.

Emotional Investment

The majority of the DTs demonstrated a sense of emotional investment and commitment to LAC. A sense of personal ownership was apparent in two of the DTs' experiences and the LAC 'label' was also used creatively to define the investment:

> *he'll be another looked after that I'll have* (DT three, line 408)

> *bearing in mind your role as looking after the children* (DT six, lines 111-112)

It was apparent that a number of the DTs experienced a very strong emotional connection and attachment to LAC and this made transitions very difficult:

> *I didn't want to let him go, really didn't want to let him go but we knew he'd be fine, we ended up going, it makes me teary he always does [cries]* (DT three, lines 371-373)

The sense of loss is apparent here through the physical tears and the repetition of "didn't want to let him go". DT three was able to reframe this situation more positively through transition planning but when this opportunity was not available the sense of loss appeared even greater:

> *We never heard anything more about him and that's the worst thing [laughs]* (DT two, lines 337-338)

> *We didn't have a chance to say goodbye or anything he, he just went* (DT two, lines 342-343)

The DTs appeared to need time to prepare for the separation and DT four highlighted the difficult but important struggle she would have to "detach emotionally" (line 642) in order to move forward without carrying the emotional burden of worry. However, this was not always successful and keeping LAC in mind, even after they'd left the school, was a shared experience amongst three DTs:

> *You do wonder, you, you're bound to wonder aren't you, you know more than any of the other children* (DT two, lines 291-295)

DTs also experienced vicarious emotions both of a positive and negative nature. Many took pride in the success of LAC, enjoyed watching them "thrive" (DT three, line 760) and experienced their transformation as "magical" (DT six, line 303). However, more difficult emotions were also experienced:

> *It's rewarding, sometimes it's exhausting. She's got a lot, an awful lot of er... emotional baggage and it's been quite tough sometimes, it's been very tough sometimes but I [laughs] it's, it's tougher for her than it is for me* (DT two, 110-113)

DT two conveys an emotional struggle and demonstrates a sense of empathy which appears important for her to support LAC. She recognises this quite apparently and uses pain and suffering to drive her:

> *I always call [laughs] the children, this isn't disparaging, I always call them the bin bag children just to remind myself that you know they do have really, really tough times, really tough times, things you wouldn't even comprehend at my age* (lines 782-787)

It became apparent through their emotional talk that the DTs themselves had to demonstrate a certain level of emotional resilience in order to overcome challenges and thrive in the face of adversity:

> *It's about the frustrations, it's about the rewards er, things that make you sad, things that make you happy, it's, it's all those things wrapped into one really* (DT four, lines 745-747)

This communicates the sense of an emotional rollercoaster where the lows drive motivation and the highs are needed for personal gratification.

Jumping Through Hoops

Four DTs expressed concerns regarding imposed requirements which manifested in the DTs experiencing a lack of control and high levels of frustration. DT five highlighted her reasons for doing the role:

> *It's, it's just one of those roles that happens because it has to happen* (lines 836-837)

This suggests that the responsibilities have been forced upon her and perhaps implies that without an external requirement she would not be undertaking the duties. There is a sense of frustration here that appears linked to following orders, something which DT six also experienced:

> *I assumed that, that you just had to go, so I used to go* (lines 82-83)

She is referring to attending meetings that she did not feel she needed to attend suggesting that she does not feel able to make decisions regarding her own actions. DT one also appeared to be working without a high level of autonomy when he first adopted the role and referred to being driven by the rules laid out in the "rubric" (line 963).

The sense of following orders appeared to have an even greater impact when their actions did not actually appear to be influencing the outcomes for LAC and they were instead working with systems that they did not perceive to be fit for purpose. DT two identified that the repetitive nature of filling out paperwork "drives her mad" (line 394) and described it as "a bug bearer of mine" (line 409). Her intense feelings of irritation and annoyance are readily apparent. DT six's experience was very similar:

> *The theory is great behind all these systems but I think in practice maybe they're not that effective, that's my impression* (lines 215-217)
>
> *I just feel like it's systems for the sake of having systems* (lines 223-224)

Although she recognises why these systems (for example, the PEP) are there, they are not improving her practice. Nor are they working for DT five:

> *We're just re-writing information that we've already got written somewhere else just on a different piece of paper, bit of a waste of time* (lines 99-103)

However, DT one used his frustrations as a motivator to change his practice (through the use of delegating):

> *Now it's developed to where it is it's, I would say that it is now useful. Originally I didn't see the usefulness of it, no I saw the necessity* (lines 143-147)

This conveys the importance of adapting systems, something which the other DTs do not appear to have done, possibly due to them feeling like they have to follow certain rules that they have no control over. The question could also be asked here about whether the primary client is LAC or professionals in the LA for whom these tasks appear to be completed.

Three of the DTs also had to manage the pressures of feeling accountable and under close examination. This was most apparent in DT one's experience:

> *I am always conscious and I'm always not afraid but I am always aware that the institution or I as designated named person hasn't done something we're supposed to do* (lines 991-993)

Although he highlights that he is not afraid, he does appear to be verging on fear "always" and this must be a great weight to carry. Although the word "we're" suggests a collective responsibility, there is the sense that it ultimately rests on his shoulders and he is well aware of this. DT two termed the monitoring aspect of her role the "Ofsted level" and DT six also referred to a situation where she might "get into trouble" (line 347) from Ofsted. These feelings of being under possible scrutiny may, on one hand, be constructive to help drive improvements, but also appear to add an additional burden that is exacerbated by being the person primarily accountable for LAC.

Recognising the Child at the Centre

This superordinate theme identifies the concept of listening and responding to the views and wishes of LAC. A number of differing experiences of working collaboratively with, or independently for, LAC were apparent. DTs also experienced difficulties with regard to working with the LAC label. See table five for related subordinate themes and the prevalence of these across DTs.

Table 5: Subordinate Themes Relating to Superordinate Theme 2

Subordinate Theme	DT one	DT two	DT three	DT four	DT five	DT six
Levels of participation	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Battling with the label	✓	✓			✓	✓

Levels of Participation

Five of the DTs spoke about the voice and influence of LAC. Many felt the need for LAC to have access to a person who was able to represent their views and empower them to have their say. However, there were mixed views regarding who was in a position to act as this advocate. Most felt that they had a role here:

> *You're their champion* (DT four, line 712)

> *We always do a question, always do a questionnaire with the children when they have a meeting so that if they don't want to go to the meeting their thoughts and er views are expressed* (DT two, lines 500-503)

DT four implies that she not only supports LAC but she also defends and fights for them. DT two's repetition of the word "always" suggests that eliciting views is a priority and there is also the sense that LAC have a choice about their attendance at meetings. However, eliciting views appears to be done at one-off times rather than as a continual process. DT one had apparently different views with regard to the advocate role:

> *The authority er social worker who comes in to represent the child* (lines 229-230)

He appears to suggest that LAC actually need external representation and although he does not imply that this is out of his remit, he does suggest that he does not have the knowledge to empower LAC about their rights and this therefore acts as a barrier:

> *If I could take the children off their timetable for a day... I would invite in a commercial... trainer or training team to spend a day with the kids and say 'look you are in this scenario you are in, looked after, you are, you are, this is what you should be... this is how you could make the best of what's going to be offered to you'* (lines 1141-1148)

Many of the DTs also experienced another barrier with regard to ensuring that LAC have a voice and this was related to age:

> *They put in this sort of child view point aspect to all of this system which I think probably kicks in when they're older, I don't think for the younger ones... it seems to be very effective* (DT six, lines 207-210)

The ethos of ensuring voice appears imposed upon her and she does not feel it is very relevant to her practice when working with primary aged children. She does not appear to take the initiative of changing the "system" or tools and instead gives the impression that LAC are unheard. Conversely, two DTs encouraged participation at a higher level by not only ensuring voice, but also influence:

> *They have a lot of involvement in it, they have a lot of say in what happens* (DT three, lines 672-673)

DT three gives the impression that the LAC actually had some control in decision making, as did DT four:

> *I'll say 'oh shall I speak to <u>social worker name</u>' who is the social worker 'do, do you want me to speak to <u>social worker name</u> about this?'* (lines 543-545)

Here she is actually allowing the child to take the lead and inform her own actions depending on their wishes.

Battling with the Label

Many of the DTs were supporting LAC who were struggling with their own identity and this caused tensions for the DTs because they needed to be perceptive and responsive in their approach. DT one highlighted the battle some LAC face:

> *One young lad in year er eight has had difficulty accepting the fact that he is living under a different situation* (DT one, lines 350-352)

DT two also experienced working with high levels of fear and she had a role in helping to support LAC to form a positive self-identity:

> *I think a lot of the children in care fear that what's happened to their parents is going to happen to them, be it mental health say* (DT two, lines 876-878)

Although both these experiences occurred in a secondary school, DT six was also battling with this in her primary school:

> *I think the, the children themselves, I don't know what I base this on, I suppose must know that they are different, I think they do and that they're in a, a, an usual situation, even though they're young I think they know that* (lines 452-455)

She spoke about the children feeling "different" and although she may be imposing her own views here, this drives her pursuit for normality. Due to this apparent identity crisis, DTs were forced to work with an element of secrecy. DT one highlights why this is so:

> *Very often when I talk to them will, will, will kind of be reticent about making it known what their background situation is* (lines 341-343)

There is an apparent dilemma here which involves supporting and helping LAC to form a positive self identity, whilst also hiding and protecting this identity from others:

> *You keep an eye on them from a distance as it were, you don't single them out in any particular way* (DT six, lines 457-459)

> *It's difficult to get a balancing act, that's what I think I'm trying to say, try, trying to balance between making sure that they do get the support they need but making sure that you're keeping enough distance that they're comfortable with it* (DT two, lines 660-664)

It is important for the DTs not to single LAC out or make them feel different but this is not always easy and there appears to be a battle here between doing enough and doing too much. All of the DTs appeared aware of the impact of exposing a child as LAC and this caused additional tensions due to the apparent repercussions:

Some member of staff or, or, or some other child for example may make a comment or may er put a situation that makes them feel just a little bit circumspect about it (DT one, lines 380-383)

Children are very mean to each other you know they, if they think there's a weakness (DT five, lines 509-510)

For these reasons a number of DTs felt under less pressure when LAC were open and honest about their status and were not hoping for secrecy.

The Importance of a Holistic Approach

This superordinate theme captures the importance DTs placed on working with others and therefore adopting a team approach to supporting LAC. There was the sense that DTs cannot support LAC in isolation and instead they rely on a number of other people to help them do this. See table six for the related subordinate themes and the prevalence of these across DTs.

Table 6: Subordinate Themes Relating to Superordinate Theme 3

Subordinate Theme	DT one	DT two	DT three	DT four	DT five	DT six
Laying the foundations	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lightening the load	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constructing the jigsaw		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Travelling the distance	✓	✓			✓	✓

Laying the Foundations

All of the DTs spoke about the importance of developing relationships with all key stakeholders and this appeared to be the foundations to a united approach to supporting LAC. It was apparent that establishing relationships and consolidating links required invested time and prolonged contact:

> *One set of carers that we've got at the minute, they've had long term contact with the school because this is their third set of children... so we know them as well* (DT five, lines 170-173)

It is apparent here that developing relationships is a process which first involves gradually getting to know each other and without this DTs can experience a barrier to collaborative working:

> *That could be an, an issue because I don't, I don't know anybody at the minute so I'll have to, I think I'll have to get to know people* (DT three, lines 321-324)

DTs gave the impression that by getting to know people on a personal level, relationships could progress to a higher level in which openness and trust were apparent. This appeared important to order to ensure open lines of communication:

> *You develop a kind of relationship with those people because they see me attend, they know who I am and I think they're more likely then to pick the phone up and speak to me* (DT four, lines 307-310)

The DTs employed a number of inter-personal skills to help facilitate the development of positive relationships. DT two spoke of the importance of being "welcoming" (line 222) and a "comfortable place to come" (line 553), DT three implied the importance of respect (line 582), DT four implied the need for empathy (line 586) and DT six implied the importance of actively listening to others (line 130). When working with foster carers a number of DTs appeared to go the extra mile in order to develop relationships by reducing the possible power imbalance:

> *I do tend to use first name terms which I don't actually, that's interesting, with any other parents, apart from perhaps governors* (DT four, line 330-332)

DT four appears to be slightly shocked by this admission and this perhaps suggests she has been treating foster carers more like professionals in an unconscious manner. DT two differed here and was consciously aware of her behaviour:

> *Going to their home if they invite you, even if you can't make it on other occasions, I do try and make sure that I go to the fir, very first meeting because I think it's rude not to* (line 560-563)

First impressions are apparently important to her but there is also a sense of her working outside of her usually territory and comfort zone. This gives a sense of vulnerability and that some of her power has been relinquished, which she appears to find important.

Lightening the Load

All of the DTs spoke about the importance of foster carers and there was a sense that they could reduce the need for intervention from the school and therefore reduce the responsibilities of the DT:

> *They're specialised in dealing with very difficult, troubled children and so from that point of view I don't need as much or don't have to put as much in pastorally, emotionally that's, that sort of way* (DT two, lines 68-73)

She appears to recognise that foster carers can play a preventative role if they are knowledgeable and willing to share the dedication. The demands placed on her needing to be emotionally available and responsive are then lessened. However, many DTs felt that it also was important for foster carers to be available to help react to difficulties:

> *She's supportive in that, obviously we've had to exclude him on a number of occasions and she will come to you know she'll drop everything and come to school* (DT four, lines 343-346)

Her sense of struggle is apparent here through the use of the word "obviously", as if the exclusion should not be a surprise. However, what helps is the ethos of the foster carer. There is the sense that supporting school staff is a priority and the foster carer makes herself readily available to do this. In a reciprocal fashion many of the DTs thought it was important for them to be available to support foster carers, perhaps because they are able to alleviate some of their burden:

> *It's important to... offer that support to, to them and to make sure the children are getting the best deal that we can give them* (DT six, 132-134)

DT six expresses the view that she can actually promote positive outcomes for LAC by helping the foster carers and all of the DTs recognised the importance of the home life of LAC. DT one conveyed his thoughts regarding this quite clearly:

> *Where the looked after system really does... work in the sense of not only, not only are they just looked after, their caring and their home scenario is being re-substituted* (lines 763-766)

All of the DTs thought it was important for LAC to feel like part of a family and this leads on to another key concept which all of the DTs experienced as paramount importance, the need for stability. The DTs spoke about the importance of LAC experiencing security and a sense of predictability:

> *He was very settled, in a home that was very settled, he'd been with them a while he was, he knows he's staying long term* (DT three, lines 652-654)

There is a sense of certainty here that not only feels safe for the child but also brings a sense of safety for the DT. However, the converse brings a sense of threat:

> *I feel that he still isn't sure where his future lies you know what, what, what's going to happen to him basically* (DT four, lines 151-152)

She appears to be questioning his future yet she is unable to provide answers and is therefore living herself with uncertainty and this appears to feel uneasy. DT two described LACs' transition into adult life as like "going off the end of a cliff" (lines 357-358) which elicits feelings of danger and fright. Working with this instability appears to be scary for the DTs too because like LAC they do not always have control over placement moves, yet foster carers play such a big role in supporting them to help LAC achieve in education.

Constructing the Jigsaw

Five of the DTs spoke about the importance of information sharing amongst all key stakeholders. DT four summed this up:

> *We can only provide part of the jigsaw and of course when they move on then we drop out of that jigsaw but er... you know the carer's part of the jigsaw, the social worker is part of that jigsaw, the other services around that child* (lines 116-120)

She gives the impression that without having holistic information she would be working with big holes and would therefore be unable to see the bigger picture. Four of the DTs talked about the importance of being "in the loop", however this did not always appear to happen and all the DTs felt uninformed and apparently excluded at times. DT three likened this to having "slipped through the net" (lines 280-281) suggesting that she felt incredibly let down by the holes in the information sharing process.

Working without holistic information appears to have a great impact on the DTs and was likened to working "in the dark" (DT three, line 136). This conveys a sense of feeling unable to fulfill key responsibilities without information that is apparently so important it can shine a light on everything else. Not having this up-to-date information could induce feelings of panic and the emotional impact on DT five was readily apparent:

> *The number of times we've sort of had heart dropping moments cause the children have told us things and then when you check it out they're like 'oh yeah, didn't we tell you?'* (lines 554-557)

However, it can also have an impact on the DTs ability to support LAC in school and adds an additional challenge to the numerous challenges DTs already face:

> *If you don't know what's going on it makes it very difficult* (DT three, lines 545-546)

> *If I'd had that knowledge I would have dealt with it better in the first place* (DT two, lines 523-525)

Whilst discussing the importance of information sharing, DT two and DT four inadvertently raised the dilemma of who owns this information and therefore who has the right to share it:

> *Sometimes things are talked about that they might not feel comfortable me listening to* (DT two, lines 257-258)

There was the sense that adults working with LAC had rights to personal information without first consulting the LAC themselves and although DT two appeared apparently uneasy with this, the need for information was greater than this concern.

Travelling the distance

Four of the DTs spoke about the difficulties of supporting LAC who were living outside of their originating LA. Although many expressed an understanding of why these placements happen, they imposed many barriers and added additional complications. The DTs experienced less face-to-face contact with external professionals because of the physical distance between them:

> *It's a long way to come isn't it and they have to get on trains and whatever and so their visits tend to be less regular* (DT two, lines 66-68)

Although DT two expressed some understanding regarding the reduced contact, it had an apparent impact on her attitude and motivation towards multi-agency working:

> *It's really difficult to juggle to make sure that when they come over I'm free cause I'm not always free* (lines 594-596)

She appeared less willing to find time for them and was less flexible in her approach compared to her availability for LAC and professionals from within the LA. She gave the sense that she had to work on their terms and this may have been driving the apparent lack of enthusiasm. Due to the lack of contact many of the DTs had not developed positive relationships with professionals:

> *Faceless people who are in another authority who you only see at LAC reviews or PEP reviews it's just, it's not the same relationship* (DT five, lines 149-151)

Here the sense of anonymity and impersonality is apparent and again suggests that the foundational relationships needed for multi-agency working had not been laid.

The DTs had differing experiences with regard to the impact this distance had on their role. The barriers for DT six appeared more imaginary:

I can get hold of the social worker if I need to do, I mean I suppose I could do in <u>city</u> but it's just somehow, the geographical distance, they just don't feel as accessible (lines 257-259)

The unfamiliarity expressed here appears to impact on her expectations rather than her actual ability. Conversely, DT two felt like she was not supported during times of crisis (line 599) and DT five felt like she was working with people who did not have up-to-date information regarding the LAC (line 51). This led to both of them feeling frustrated and exacerbated the already existing challenges.

Working on the Margins

This superordinate theme captures the feelings of isolation and invisibility that DTs experience. The sense of the unknown was also widely apparent, as was the forgotten nature of the role. See table seven for the related subordinate themes and the prevalence of these across DTs.

Table 7: Subordinate Themes Relating to Superordinate Theme 4

Subordinate Theme	DT one	DT two	DT three	DT four	DT five	DT six
Detached DT community	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Working undercover	✓	✓			✓	✓
The forgotten role			✓	✓	✓	✓

Detached Designated Teacher Community

The majority of the DTs were not in contact with other DTs and were therefore working with a sense of mystery and uncertainty on a number of levels. The first level involved the actual characteristics of LAC. Two of the DTs had quite opposing

experiences regarding this, however the common experience they shared was a sense of the unknown:

> *A lot of the looked after children in care in our school, it might not be in all schools, but in our school a lot of the children in care are also on the SEN register* (DT two, lines 3-6)

> *You always like to compare yourself to other schools and other schools in the area so to kind of know you know we don't have any exclusions for looked after children, we don't have any behaviour problems for looked after children so are we just lucky or is that the wider picture* (DT five, lines 720-724)

DT five struggled to understand where the LAC in her school fit into the "wider picture" and this appears to have an impact on her understanding of the needs of this vulnerable group as a whole. It is interesting to note that she likes to compare herself however, she apparently has not done this. This could reflect her true levels of motivation or be an indicator that she feels she needs support to do this.

Another level involved the numbers of LAC that the DTs were supporting:

> *We've got relatively few we think I mean I don't know the numbers in other schools but currently we have seven* (DT one, lines 31-33)

The lack of this foundational and simplistic knowledge again appears to signify how remote and removed the DTs are from each other. The final level of the unknown, and perhaps the most significant, involved understanding how the DT role operates and how the responsibilities are realised in other schools. Although some DTs made presumptions about the role in other schools using terms such as "I would imagine" (DT five, line 625) and "I think it, it does happen" (DT four, lines 286), the sense of unpredictability was still apparent. DT six suggested that the lack of a DT community could actually be impacting on how effective she is in promoting positive outcomes for LAC:

> *I suppose I never speak to any other person who's a designated teacher so you don't know whether you're doing the job properly or, or, or not, whether there's other things you could be doing or, I don't know* (DT six, lines 186-189)

She appears to convey that this contact could not only provide a sense of reassurance but also provide a platform for sharing good practice.

Working Undercover

Four of the DTs were working within a school system where people did not acknowledge, recognise or understand their role. This led to the DTs living through unique experiences which no-one within their schools could relate to as an insider. This naturally appeared to elicit feelings of isolation amongst some:

> *I think people, people don't realise how much time it takes, how time consuming it is* (DT two, lines 448-45)

The repetition of the word "time" emphasises her struggle yet she must manage this without sympathy or empathy from her colleagues. She also appears to be doing a lot to support LAC yet her actions are apparently invisible to others. Rather than experiencing anger at colleagues, many DTs appeared to have a level of understanding:

> *I don't think people, well you wouldn't unless you're doing it, know the, the er I suppose the time commitment there is around it all* (DT six, lines 469-471)

Here DT six appears to suggest that without actually living through the experience, people cannot truly understand it and she therefore does not blame her colleagues for the role being apparently lost and unnoticed. Although it appears people cannot understand their experiences because they have not walked in their shoes, DTs were able to relate to this by reflecting on their own experiences as an outsider before they began the role:

> *It's funny really because I didn't really give it much thought before I did the, had the role and that sounds awful doesn't it [laughs]. Somebody else was doing it within the school and that, that was okay* (DT two, lines 176-179)

Although DT two appears to feel a sense of guilt in retrospect, her talk normalises the undercover nature of the role. It is apparent that the DTs had to make a transition into the unknown when taking on the role and this suggests the inability to fully

prepare for the novel and challenging experiences. DT five did not blame colleagues for their lack of knowledge either and actually appeared to point the blame inwards:

> *It's not a role that is a sort of widely publicised extra role and I think they just assume I'm there because I'm head* (lines 654-656)

She appears to be adopting the role in a secretive fashion where she does not correct the beliefs of others but actually fulfills the role in disguise. This may mirror her belief that it is not a separate and discrete role but something that she would simply do as head teacher. DT one did not appear to long for empathetic understanding either:

> *The vast majority of teaching staff just know that my name's next to it the, the, really and, and they've no need to really to be fair to them* (lines 816-820)

Although he apparently struggled to articulate his thoughts regarding this, he suggests a new angle that people do not actually need to know about his role and responsibilities. Although all the DTs experienced the undercover nature of the role and the impact of this in different ways, there appears be to a stark gap in DTs working with colleagues in the school system to not only increase understanding of their role but also increase understanding regarding the needs of LAC.

The Forgotten Role

Four of the DTs experienced frustration with regard to working with external professionals. Three of the DTs spoke about undertaking duties that were apparently beyond their remit and this had a great impact on their functioning:

> *It sometimes means that we have to work harder, well it obviously does* (DT four, line 265-266)

> *You think well they said they'd do that but now I've ended up doing it and it's, it's that sort of stuff that doesn't work* (DT five, lines 500-501)

> *I supervised lunch cause I didn't want to turn round to parents and say 'you can't see him cause nobody's turned up'. I thought there was more threat then to us as a school than if I supervised* (DT three, lines 119-122)

It is clear here that DT three was forced into making a decision and performing actions that were beyond her responsibilities and this opened her up to potential harm. A lot of the anger amongst DTs was aimed at social workers who did not acknowledge the impact their actions had on them. It appears that DTs are not only working on the perimeter but they are also on the edge of other people's thoughts. There is a sense here that DTs are not only invisible to people in school, but also external professionals who may not actually see them often. The phrase 'out of sight out of mind' appears to resonate with their experiences of working with external professionals and this leads to blurred role boundaries.

The amount of energy that DTs invested in struggling for acknowledgement was apparent though the use of words such as "pushed and pushed" (DT three, line 187), "chase" (DT six, line 342) and "fight" (DT four, line 12). All these suggest that this can be physically exhausting (potentially painful) and positions them against others who are apparently the opposition. Many of the DTs tried not to let this impact on their ability to support LAC but the frustration was still apparent:

> *I can imagine it would have been very easy for me to say 'well they can't be bothered so I'm not going to bother' but you know that's, that's not going to help him* (DT four, lines 254-258)

Many of the DTs experienced a sense of powerlessness in their fight for support and the prolonged nature of this inflicted feelings of demoralisation:

> *Sometimes you just have to hold your hands up and say actually I've done what I can and short of actually doing this you know which would be out of my remit I can't do anything else* (DT four, lines 63-66)

The sense of not being treated as a priority was apparent and the DTs also experienced a significant power imbalance:

> *The social worker had cancelled at the last minute but he couldn't do any other spot* (DT six, lines 175-176)

There was also the feeling that adopting this position of lacking control was a deterministic stance:

It's frustrating more than anything and no matter how much you can, you complain it doesn't seem to change. I felt like we had a year with that child, in a way I'm glad, that's the only reason I'm glad he's gone because we no longer have those dealings... with, with them (DT three, lines 463-467)

There is the sense here that she feels that she has been fighting a losing battle and the frustration of this appears so encompassing that it is enough to put a positive slant on the feelings of loss that were so significant.

Variability in Role and Support Needs

This superordinate theme captures the progressive and developing nature of the role whilst also recognising it as being unstable and fluid. This variability means that support for DTs needs to be adaptable and tailored to their needs. See table eight for the related subordinate themes and the prevalence of these across DTs.

Table 8: Subordinate Themes Relating to Superordinate Theme 5

Subordinate Theme	DT one	DT two	DT three	DT four	DT five	DT six
Developing competence	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Relevant and available support	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The lack of consistency	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓

Developing Competence

All of the DTs demonstrated development and progression with regard to their practice, knowledge and ability to support LAC. Many of the DTs spoke about "picking it up as you go along" (DT six, line 45) and the importance of time in order to understand the role:

If we'd have spoken five or six years ago I'd have, the tone of the conversation would have been more along the lines of concerns about not knowing what the role needed from me (DT one, lines 1217-1220)

Three of the DTs spoke about venturing into new territory and encountering new experiences:

> *I think that this new twist, going to this life appreciation day, that was something I'd never done before and I really enjoyed that* (DT five, 395-397)

She suggests that although she was out of her usual working remit, she "really" enjoyed this novelty and was quite happy to flexibly adapt to this new experience. However, adapting to new ways of working did not appear as easy for DT two:

> *To be going into people's homes is a, is, is a completely different experience and, and that was... it sounds ridiculous but it's something you have to learn* (lines 713-716)

Working out of her comfort zone appeared to present somewhat of an initial challenge for her however, there was the sense that through time and experience she was able to become accustomed to this practice.

The development of competence was reassuring for most of the DTs however, the need to have this time in the role led DT four to think about the transition and preparation needed:

> *If I knew that I was going say in a year I would make sure that there was somebody in school who was kind of shadowing me and seconding me so that they were up to speed and could take that role on* (lines 727-731)

She suggests that the role is not easily adopted and requires momentum to be gathered in order to build capacity. There are therefore great benefits to seeing this in practice initially, something which most of the DTs did not have an opportunity to do.

Relevant and Available Support

All of the DTs spoke about the importance of having external support, specifically in relation to the LA DT training which they had all attended. They highlighted that they often attended this training for a refresher (DT four, line 669), as a reminder

(DT six, line 556) and as an update (DT three, line 723). This suggests that the DTs are not only able to gain renewed energy from attending but it also highlights the evolving nature of the role and the need to be knowledgeable about local and national developments. Although all of the DTs found the training useful at points, it was apparent that the blanket training did not always meet their personal support needs and this was expressed at both extremes:

> *I think it assumed a lot of knowledge so really what I could have done with was a sort of from basics* (DT six, lines 22-24)

> *I've been doing this for ten years so I'm more looking for the 'so how do we get this done then?'* (DT two, lines 760-761)

The DTs here have differing expectations regarding what would be useful to them and this appears to highlight that training needs to mirror competence levels in order for it to be beneficial and improve practice. As this apparently did not happen, some of the DTs felt they had not gained applicable knowledge and were therefore unenthusiastic about attending:

> *I wasn't kind of told anything new or wildly exciting that I went back into school and said 'oh let's do this for them' it was like well we're already doing that* (DT five, lines 668-671)

The lack of relevant content appears to risk DTs disengaging from this platform that they themselves have recognised as being important for reinvigoration.

DT one spoke about the need for external support to help him reflect on his practice:

> *I think it's working okay, I refer to somebody coming in and doing an assessment for the day, like a mini Ofsted and coming down and saying 'right in terms of looked after participant two, yeah, yeah, yeah, no, no, no, no'* (lines 1022-1025)

He demonstrates that independently he finds it difficult to evaluate his own practice and identify points for improvement. A number of the other DTs also appeared to benefit from having the opportunity to explore and make sense of their role more as part of the interview process. DT four expressed this explicitly:

> *It's very interesting talking about this role [laughs] because you don't think,*
> *you know you, you just get on with it and you don't really think about it in*
> *these terms but actually yeah there is a lot to it isn't there* (lines 417-420)

She appeared shocked herself at how many different thoughts and feelings she had regarding her role and responsibilities, but through discussions these became more conscious suggesting the value of an interested listener.

Most of the DTs talked about the importance of having support which is readily available and does not need to be fought for:

> *I do know there are, there are, there's somebody like _EWO name_ at the end*
> *of a phone if I have got any issues* (DT three, lines 554-556)

The ability to rely on this appears to provide security and comfort even when it is not needed. Three of the DTs sought support internally from their colleagues, however only two suggested that this was emotionally supportive. Interestingly, these were the two DTs that did not appear to be working undercover and instead highlighted the overt nature of their role.

The Lack of Consistency

Four of the DTs spoke about the fluidity of the role which can vary depending on a number of key factors including the numbers of LAC on roll and their individual needs. Many of the DTs positioned themselves as different to DTs in other schools due to these foundational factors:

> *I think it depends on the child, I think in terms of carrying out the role* (DT
> five, lines 735-736)

> *I think if I worked in a city school and, and they, they were in their tens,*
> *which it could be, I would be less aware* (DT one, lines 359-361)

They appear to highlight the undefined nature of the role and how the translation into practice depends on the current cohort of LAC in each unique setting. This suggests that comparisons between DTs' practice are not immediately applicable and role clarity must be understood in relation to a number of factors. However, these factors

not only impact on variability across schools but also within each setting. Many of the DTs spoke about the ever changing nature of their responsibilities and appeared to compare their role in the past to their role in the present:

> *At that time we only had nine looked after children in the school* (DT two, lines 84-85)

> *It's massively more but clearly because we've got so many now* (DT six, lines 245-246)

It is apparent that their responsibilities and the demands have increased over time as the number of LAC have increased. Many of the DTs appeared to recognise that the wavering nature of the role meant that they also had to consider the nature of their role in the future, however this leads to another dilemma, the need to be prepared for the unknown future:

> *If we had higher numbers it would almost, it would almost certainly be a separate post in the school* (DT one, lines 544-545)

> *I can see that you might have to delegate which I've not done but you may have to start doing so* (DT six, lines 670-672)

Both the DTs are imagining their future responses and actions to increased numbers, however there is the sense that they have not fully reflected upon how this may look or work in practice. They are therefore not fully prepared for this happening and the thought may actually be worrying. DT two was able to reflect on this position after progressing through this situation of increased numbers of LAC:

> *I would think it must be quite difficult for schools that don't get a large intake because then you're putting new measures in place all the time aren't you instead of having em, things embedded* (lines 699-704)

It is interesting that DT two appears to be concerned about the positions of DTs like one and six, while they are concerned about being in her position. This worry is perhaps heightened by the lack of DT contact and therefore the sparsity of reassurance and sharing of practice. However, DT two raised an interesting point with regard to being prepared and implied that without this, DTs are in fact adopting a reactive approach rather than a proactive approach and this may impact on their ability to support LAC.

Summary of Findings

The importance of 'personal commitment and the need for resilience' was apparent throughout the DTs experiences and this was needed to support the DTs to persevere with their endeavour to support LAC despite being faced with a number of barriers and challenges. The DTs appeared to place an emphasis on the importance of 'recognising the child at the centre', however this again induced a number of difficulties including how to ensure voice and influence, and how to promote a positive sense of identity for LAC. The DTs stressed the 'importance of a holistic approach' and emphasised that they could not work at improving the outcomes for LAC in isolation. Instead, they prioritised developing relationships with a number of key stakeholders in order to facilitate communication and reciprocal support. The DTs appeared to be 'working on the margins' when fulfilling their responsibilities and this inflicted feelings of uncertainty, isolation and apparent invisibility. The DTs often appeared to be forgotten by others and experienced a significant lack of control when working with external professionals. Finally, the DTs demonstrated a great 'variability in role and support needs' which emphasised that although external support was highly valued, this needed to reflect their current needs, knowledge and competence levels.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to consider the research findings in relation to psychological theory and previous literature in this area. I will discuss how the findings can illuminate previous research and how already existing literature can support with the exploration of these findings. As some unanticipated topics emerged through the interpretative analysis, I will introduce some new literature that appears relevant and can aid understanding.

This research aspired to answer the broad research question:

How do Designated Teachers make sense of their experiences of supporting Looked After Children?

Five superordinate themes emerged from the interpretative analysis which help facilitate understanding in relation to this question. The superordinate themes that emerged were: 'personal commitment and the need for resilience', 'recognising the child at the centre', 'the importance of a holistic approach', 'working on the margins' and 'variability in role and support needs'. These will each be presented and discussed in turn.

Personal Commitment and the Need for Resilience

The government introduced the DT initiative as one way of enhancing the educational achievement of LAC (DCSF, 2009c). The drive to raise the profile of LAC within education (McParlin, 1996) appears to be on a trajectory towards realisation through this reform, as all of the DTs were aware of the LAC within their schools. Although Norwich et al (2010) argue that school staff often fail to acknowledge or understand the needs of LAC, the DTs appeared to have a good insight into the vulnerability of this group. The DTs concurred with the national statistics regarding the special educational needs of LAC (DfE, 2013b) and

employed several emotive terms to describe them. However, unlike the labelling and stigmatisation previously identified (Barnardo's, 2006), the DTs did not appear to attribute blame to within-child factors. Instead they appeared to be describing the needs of LAC in order to convey the complexity of their responsibilities, whilst also highlighting the importance of having an insightful DT in school to help support their education and access to additional support.

Day and Kington (2008) argue that teaching is an emotionally demanding venture which can evoke a continuum of different feelings. However, this argument also appears to extend to the experiences of DTs who demonstrated a number of apparently contrasting emotions ranging from pride, joy and empathy to frustration, sadness and worry. The role of emotions within the school context has been previously neglected and possibly refuted (Day & Leitch, 2001), however the relevance to DTs' experiences of supporting LAC appears prominent. This is perhaps not surprising considering "emotions are absolutely central to our understanding of experience" (Smith et al, 2009, p.199). The DTs apparently experienced a wide variety of emotions and embarked upon an emotional journey, which brought about both a positive and negative personal impact. For some, this deep emotional involvement appeared to be the driving force which encouraged personal commitment and a high level of motivation towards supporting LAC. This supports Day and Kington's (2008) argument that emotions have a very powerful influence over thoughts and actions.

This commitment and involvement also appeared to be related to a very strong emotional attachment to LAC which was experienced by a number of DTs and conveyed through a sense of ownership, loss and the need to keep LAC in mind. Day et al (2012) highlight that LAC place a great importance on having an emotional connection with a teacher in school, however the teacher role and the DT role appear to differ in the amount of face-to-face contact they have with LAC. Only one of the DTs (DT two) spent prolonged periods building relationships with LAC and could be identified as an 'additional' attachment figure (Bomber, 2007). The emotional connection experienced by the others was therefore not developed through close personal relationships with LAC, nor did it drive the need to develop these

relationships. Instead, for some, this strong emotional connection appeared to influence motivational involvement from a distance.

It was interesting to hear how invested DTs can become emotionally and Aultman et al (2009) pose a number of questions regarding professional teacher boundaries such as 'how much caring is too much?' and 'where is the line between constructive involvement and becoming too involved?'. They conclude that this line is difficult to define and may differ depending on individual pupils. The findings from this study suggest that it can also differ when comparing children from disadvantaged groups to their peers. Bomber (2007) highlights:

> *We are often told in schools to be professionals and to not get too involved emotionally; these children will certainly challenge this principle! We would not be human if we weren't moved in some way by children who have experienced trauma and loss* (p.74)

The emotional involvement may therefore be driven by the previous experiences of LAC, the difficult stories in their lives and the apparent vulnerability of these children and young people. However, this intense involvement may also create an apparent vulnerability on the part of the DT.

Many of the DTs demonstrated a high level of emotional involvement, however there were two DTs who appeared less invested emotionally. On the one hand this appears to position them as less vulnerable, however this could be seen as impacting greatly on their motivation. This links to the argument that DTs must want to adopt the role and having it forced upon them can therefore result in the responsibilities being experienced as a burden (APPG, 2012).

The DTs experienced a number of challenges as part of their role which included working with vulnerability, balancing heavy workloads, being accountable and working with systems that they did not perceive to be fit for purpose. However, despite all of these difficulties, the DTs tended to persevere in their attempts to support LAC achieve in education. They therefore appeared to demonstrate a certain level of resilience in order to remain committed to this endeavour and undeterred. Although the concept of resilience has been discussed and investigated with regard

to LAC (Dent & Cameron, 2003) and also to teachers in general (Beltman et al, 2011), this study suggests the concept also relates to DTs' experiences. Although the DTs encountered many difficulties, the concept of resilience helps to shift the focus away from these risk factors towards protective factors. Protective factors are those that support with the ability to thrive and are located within individuals and the wider environment (Masten et al, 1990).

Castro et al (2010) investigated protective factors for teachers in terms of practical applications to practice and argued that teachers employ a number of coping strategies in order to overcome challenges. The DTs in this study appeared to do the same and the main strategies apparent included prioritising and delegating. Skinner et al (2003) categorise this type of coping as 'negotiation' which:

> *Refers to active attempts to work out a compromise between the priorities of the individual and the constraints of the situation* (p.242)

These types of coping strategies could be categorised as problem-focused rather than emotion-focused as attempts are made to reduce demands rather than reduce the emotional impact (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). However, two of the DTs did discuss emotion-focused strategies which involved mentally preparing for separation and seeking emotional support from colleagues. These were the DTs who were not working 'undercover' and therefore this emotional support appeared more readily available as colleagues had an understanding of their difficulties.

Only one of the DTs employed the coping strategy of adapting systems to suit, with the majority instead experiencing a lack of control, power and autonomy. This is consistent with other research that highlights that DTs often conform to and comply with external instructions and fail to modify systems (for example, PEPs) to ensure they are useful (Hayden, 2005). This appears to act as an additional risk factor in regard to their levels of resilience as self-efficacy has been highlighted as a fundamental protective component (Gu & Day, 2007) but appears to be lacking. Bandura (1982) argues that:

Perceived self-efficacy is concerned with judgements of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations (p. 122)

With regard to this definition, the DTs may have felt that they lacked the knowledge and confidence to improve the systems. However, their experiences also appear to relate to Rotter's (1966) concept of locus of control, where they believe the power lies externally (with professionals in the LA) and therefore they do not have any control over the systems in place. Driscoll (2011) highlighted that many LAC disengage from the PEP process because it does not lead to change, however the DTs did not have this option due to the legal requirements and feelings of accountability. Instead they continued to work with systems that they did not perceive to be beneficial to them or LAC and this caused great frustration.

High levels of personal commitment and the need for resilience was apparent in the DTs' experiences. These findings support the assertion that senior leaders in schools should have regard to the personal qualities needed before appointing a DT and ensure that enough time is given to fulfill the responsibilities (Fletcher-Campbell et al, 2003). Although it has been identified that an interest in LAC is of great importance (APPG, 2012), these findings suggest that DTs also need to be able to draw upon a range of protective factors in order to strive in the face of adversity.

Recognising the Child at the Centre

Nearly all of the DTs spoke about the voice and influence of LAC, suggesting that it is something that they consider as part of their experiences. Previous researchers have identified why ensuring participation is important (for example, Head, 2011; Leeson, 2007), however the findings here suggest that in practice DTs place differing emphases on this. This is consistent with research that highlights that only some LAC feel that they are listened to and have an active role in decision making (Ofsted, 2010). Hart (1992) created a 'ladder of participation' to represent different levels of participation. According to this model, some of the practice of the DTs could be seen as non-participation and instead tokenistic. This was apparent through the use of questionnaires where LAC were given a voice but they did not have any choice in

the format in which their views were communicated. However, there were also examples of higher levels of participation where their views were valued, treated seriously and given weight. Nevertheless, it could be argued that the power was always situated with the DTs as participation was always initiated by them.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) states that all children and young people have the right to express their opinions and have their views taken into account in matters which affect them. However, it is acknowledged that the amount of influence should be dependent on the age, maturity and capability of each individual child (Article 12 and 13). A number of DTs cited age as a barrier to ensuring voice and influence. Shier (2001) built upon Hart's (1992) ladder and created an additional model to help explore aspects of the participation process. Here it is highlighted that a commitment and ethos is first needed, but having the knowledge, skills and resources is also essential to facilitating participation. This appears pertinent to this study as none of the DTs who were concerned about age spoke about employing different ideas or activities to support with eliciting views. However, many creative approaches and tools exist (Leeson, 2007; Lewis, 2002; Harding & Atkinson, 2009) and it could be argued that DTs are well placed to mediate and scaffold the process of decision making to help support LAC to develop skills in this area (Feuerstein et al, 1991).

It has been argued that one of the primary responsibilities of the DT is to act as an advocate for LAC (DCSF, 2009c; Driscoll, 2013). However, Oliver et al (2006) highlight that this concept can be understood and interpreted in different ways which can therefore impact upon the actions of an 'advocate'. They highlight that an advocate should represent, support and empower LAC, which indirectly implies that an advocate needs to be knowledgeable about their rights. Although none of the DTs identified themselves as specifically being an advocate, it was apparent that some of them were fulfilling these duties to a certain extent. However, they did not all appear to possess the knowledge needed to entirely fulfil these responsibilities.

The DTs in this study identified that many LAC often struggle with their own identity and although there has been little research into this area (Madigan et al, 2013), it has previously been identified that LAC often attempt to reject the identity

of being 'looked after' as this positions them as different from their peers (McMurray et al, 2011). It has been highlighted that LAC strive for 'normalisation' in school, want to be treated the same as their peers and do not want to be made to stand out (Martin & Jackson, 2002; Barnardo's, 2006; DFES, 2006). Driscoll (2011) found that LAC were apprehensive about the role of the DT because of these reasons and because they felt that DTs may not always acknowledge their feelings or act with discretion. The findings from this study suggest that DTs are actually aware of this dilemma and their understanding influences their actions. They therefore appeared to be practising with a certain level of reflexivity, with an implicit regard to the questions posed by Billington (2006) concerning how we speak of children and how we speak with children.

Many of the DTs appeared to experience some difficulties with regard to balancing the wishes of LAC with their statutory responsibilities to enhance their educational achievement. The research conducted by Barnardo's (2006) indirectly identified this dilemma when reporting that although LAC want to be treated the same as their peers, they also find it helpful for allowances to be made when they are experiencing difficulties out of school. This tension appears to link back to involving LAC in decision making processes and suggests the importance of DTs being responsive to individual needs rather than considering the needs of LAC as a homogeneous group. Madigan et al (2013) argue that LAC are often labelled to help support school staff to identify need and focus support, however these findings suggest that LAC should be supported to individually take control and ownership of their status rather than the converse.

The Importance of a Holistic Approach

One of the main responsibilities of the DT is to ensure that school staff are working with external professionals to facilitate a joined up and holistic approach to supporting LAC (DCSF, 2009c). The findings from this study suggest that the DTs placed a great importance on working with others (specifically foster carers, birth parents and social workers) and actually relied heavily upon these people to help them promote successful outcomes for LAC. These findings support other research

into multi-agency working which highlights that spending time with people facilitates the development of relationships and the formation of trust (Osborne et al, 2009). The DTs demonstrated a number of inter-personal skills such as respect, empathy, active listening and a non-judgemental approach in order to support with developing key relationships. These skills resonate with the humanistic paradigm, particularly the work of Rogers (1951), and appear to place a personal responsibility on the DTs to ensure the formation of relationships. Demonstrating this onus appears to emphasise that DTs view these relational foundations as crucial in order to assist with open channels of communication and therefore information sharing.

The DTs expressed a strong view regarding the importance of working as part of a holistic team rather than independently. It has been highlighted throughout the literature that educational needs cannot be viewed in isolation (Driscoll, 2011) and this was one of the driving forces surrounding the introduction of the DT role (DCSF, 2009c). Many of the DTs suggested that one of the most important reasons for working with others was to share information to inform practice. This is similar to the views of other DTs who appeared to rate this as a top necessity (Hayden, 2005). DCSF (2009c) highlight that it is the responsibility of the DT to ensure that effective lines of communication are in place. However, these findings suggest that despite having the right ethos, DTs cannot ensure this alone and therefore cannot take sole responsibility. The suggestion that two way communication is not always obtainable supports Ofsted (2012) who recognised that DTs can often find it very difficult to gain contact with professionals such as social workers.

The statutory guidance states that DTs should co-operate with external professionals, but also suggests that they should be working in partnership (DCSF, 2009c). This invokes some confusion as to how DTs should be practicing and the dilemma regarding the meaning of different terms surrounding multi-agency working has been identified (Hughes, 2006). Hughes (2006) devised a ladder of multi-agency involvement with the bottom step representing co-operation (liaising and sharing information) and higher levels representing collaboration (joint case exploration and hypotheses sharing). With regard to this ladder, the DTs appeared to be hoping for multi-agency co-operation and higher levels of joined up working were not apparent. It is unclear if this is because the DTs did not feel higher levels would be beneficial

or they did not believe this could happen as simply working in co-operation was often difficult. However, if Hughes' (2006) terminology implies the same as the DCSF (2009c), there is no statutory obligation to work at a higher level.

The DTs placed a great importance on the role of the foster carer and appeared to rely on them to help alleviate some of their pressures. Comfort (2007) highlights that many foster carers have difficulties supporting the education of LAC because they find it hard to approach school staff. Many of the DTs in this study appeared to go that extra mile to ensure that foster carers did not feel intimidated but in fact felt valued and respected. The research conducted by Comfort (2007) was before the DT role was put on a statutory footing and the foster carers in that study may have therefore felt confused about who they should approach. This again links back to the importance DTs placed on forming relationships with foster carers as it is a lot more difficult to work with people you do not know and the DTs appeared to recognise this from their own perspective and from that of the foster carer. Maclay et al (2006) found that foster carers often felt undervalued and unsupported by social workers, however the findings from this study suggest that DTs place a great emphasis on valuing and supporting foster carers. This appears to be because they recognised the importance of home life and its impact on education. Although NICE (2010) recommends that foster carers need support from professionals, they do not allude to the DT role in this. However, the findings from this research suggest that DTs can play an important role in helping to support foster carers to meet the needs of LAC.

There is a vast amount of literature demonstrating the importance of LAC having stability both inside and outside of school (Jackson & Cameron, 2012) and the impact frequent moves can have on the educational attainment (DFES, 2006), resilience (APPG, 2012) and social relationships (DFES, 2007) of LAC. Supporting stability is therefore a key government priority and the DTs had an insight into the importance of this from their own experiences. They did not only appear to be able to stand in the shoes of LAC in order to have an insight into what unpredictability feels like for them, but they also appeared to mirror these feelings and therefore readily worried about the lack of security. DCSF (2009c) highlights that the DT should be consulted about possible placement moves but due to the unpredictability of a range of factors, this did not always happen. It therefore appears that DTs

(especially when emotionally invested) also feel the impact of living without a sense of permanence.

APPG (2012) found that difficulties supporting LAC who are living outside of their originating LA was a recurring issue and communication across LAs needed to improve. The DTs in this study also expressed concerns regarding their ability to support LAC who were placed within the LA by their originating LA. All of the important concepts discussed above such as forming relationships and sharing information were highlighted as being impacted and this caused additional challenges. This would suggest that difficulties should not only be viewed at a strategic LA level, but also at an operational level. Ofsted (2014) found that children placed out of their originating LA were less likely to receive appropriate support in education. The findings from this research would support the assertion that educational support can indeed be impeded by the lack of a holistic, multi-agency approach. It is interesting to highlight that LAC living out of authority are identified as being more at risk of poorer educational outcomes (APPG, 2012) and this may suggest that these LAC need the most support educationally. However, the findings from this study imply that these are the LAC that the DTs have most difficulty supporting and cross-authority collaboration does therefore need to improve.

Working on the Margins

Previous literature has identified that LAC fail to have their needs recognised and responded to (Berridge, 2012), lack voice and power (Ofsted, 2010) and are often lost in the school system due to their minority status (Harker et al, 2004). The findings from this study suggest that DTs appear to encounter similar difficulties when working within the school system and with social work professionals. DTs experience a sense of isolation where their presence is not always recognised and instead they work with invisibility. They are often working with a power-imbalance and fail to have control over the actions of others. They also understand what it is like to be lost and forgotten due to their minority status. Although research into the educational experiences of LAC appears to have gained momentum, there is very little published research focusing on DTs' viewpoints. The findings from this study

suggest that many DTs do not publicise their own role and therefore continue to be working on the margins. This may suggest that external support (from professionals and researchers) is needed to help with raising awareness and understanding surrounding DTs' unique perspectives.

Day et al (2006) argue that a sense of professional identity is needed to ensure job satisfaction and effective practice. Having this identity helps people develop their own understanding regarding how to practise and how to understand the context in which their practice is placed (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). The development of professional identity is based on a number of factors including personal views and the context in which this identity is realised (Flores & Day, 2006). It appears that some DTs did not allow themselves to adopt a different identity as a DT for LAC and instead assimilated their responsibilities into an already existing professional identity, such as one of a head teacher. However, within other contexts DTs appeared to have difficulties creating a new professional identity due to colleagues within the school system not recognising this and therefore not facilitating its formation. This is similar to previous findings which highlight that knowledge of the DT role is not widespread amongst teaching staff (Fletcher-Campbell et al, 2003). As interacting with others appears to be so important to professional identity development, a lone DT working undercover does not appear to have the opportunities needed to shape this. However, difficulties do not occur simply within each school system and it therefore appears relevant to also consider the collective identity of DTs.

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) highlights that a sense of identity is developed based on group membership and the focus is therefore on social identity rather than personal identity. It is argued that being associated with a certain group influences how you think and behave. Within this study the DTs did not appear to affiliate themselves as members of a DT community and so there was a lack of group identity. This meant that there were no pre-existing thoughts, beliefs and actions for the DTs to compare themselves and their practice.

Hymans (2008) introduces the concept of 'role' in which expected patterns of behaviour are associated. He argues that:

It is important for people working in the same professional role to construe certain experiences, events and other people in similar ways. This commonality of construing ensures successful and similar outcomes (p. 282)

However, although all of the DTs were working in the same professional role, the isolation meant that they did not fully understand their role in relation to others and would therefore be unlikely to act in explicit congruence with one another. It appears that without a group identity to provide the basis of role clarity, there is instead role confusion and a lack of definition. This lack of contact could be influencing the apparent apprehension to adapt systems, not only because models of good practice are unavailable, but also because a sense of identity and role supports a sense of agency and feelings of empowerment (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

Before the DT role became statutory it was acknowledged that there was a lack of communication between DTs (Fletcher-Campbell et al, 2003). The findings from this study would suggest that this is still a significant issue, however some examples of best practice do exist. Ofsted (2012) identified a number of LAs where DT networks had been established and involved DTs meeting regularly to share good practice and exchange information. The DTs reported that this forum helped them to develop a mutual understanding of the role and increased the consistency of practice. This DT network was not apparent in this current study and the DTs therefore did not have these opportunities. Instead they were working with a sense of mystery and a lack of group identity. This echoes the concerns raised by APPG (2012), that there is great variability in the way in which the role is performed.

Although multi-agency working has been discussed with a main focus on information sharing, it also appears relevant to consider it with regard to DTs working on the margins and being apparently forgotten. It has been identified that difficulties can occur due to professionals holding differing views regarding successful outcomes for LAC (Coulling, 2000) and social workers not placing enough emphasis on the importance of education (Harker et al, 2004). Within this study it is apparent that a number of the DTs were experiencing this dilemma in practice and this caused great frustration. However, there was the sense that it did not stop their drive but instead hindered it, meaning that they had to put in more effort. Linked to this, it has been recognised that a lack of understanding of others' roles

and responsibilities can act as a barrier to multi-agency working (Sloper 2004; Rose, 2011). The findings from this study suggest that DTs experience a lack of role clarity and although they were aware when they had reached their boundaries, there is an implicit suggestion that this lack of clarity amongst DTs could cause a lack of clarity from the point of view of others professionals. Other professionals may therefore not be fully enlightened on the remit of DTs and when certain duties are beyond this remit.

Harker et al (2004) identified that having a strong leader to promote multi-agency working and ensure accountability facilitates effective joint working. Ofsted (2012) found that a number of DTs praised the role of the VH for their support in strengthening relationships between professionals and therefore enhancing multi-agency working. Only one of the DTs in this study made reference to the role of the VH and this was not in the capacity of supporting professional collaboration. It therefore appears that this is a role that also needs to be publicised more (especially amongst DTs) with regard to what support can and should be offered. It is argued that another one of the responsibilities of the VH is to hold school staff to account and support social workers to do the same (Driscoll, 2013). This has been viewed as important because school staff can be seen as holding more power than social work professionals (Berridge et al, 2009). In opposition, the findings from this study suggest that DTs often feel that they lack the power to influence social workers and they feel unable to initiate or influence change. It may therefore be beneficial for the VH to also support the DT to hold others to account when they do not appear to be fulfilling their own responsibilities and an emphasis should also be placed on this. Having this platform could again increase the self-efficacy of the DTs.

Variability in Role and Support Needs

The importance of stability has been discussed with regard to LAC and the systems within which they operate (for example, home and school). The DTs appeared to have a great insight into the consequences of instability when considering the needs of LAC and this manifested in apparent concern. However, it appears that the DT role is also considerably unstable and there are a number of variable factors that

influence how the role operates, including the number of LAC on role and the needs of those LAC. This means that the demands could be potentially ever-changing and the DTs are working towards an unknown future. DTs having concerns about increasing numbers of LAC has been identified in the literature (Hayden, 2005) and was also apparent within this study. However, one DT who was supporting an exceptionally large number of LAC appeared quite comfortable with her position. This concern therefore appears to link back to DTs feeling that they have the time and capacity to support LAC and are not spinning too many plates. It emphasises that a blanket amount of time may not be appropriate and instead this needs to be considered in relation to the needs of LAC and the needs of DTs within each school context.

The prospect of working towards an unknown future appears to have significant implications for how prepared DTs are to support potential LAC. Strauss et al (2012) introduce the concept of a 'future work self' which is a representation of people's aspirations regarding what they want to achieve in relation to their job role. It assumes that people take an active role in shaping their future and the most important motivational factor to achieving your goals is having a 'future work self' which is clear and easy to imagine. In relation to this research, many of the DTs had difficulties imagining their role in the future and due to the uncertainty they could not create a concrete image of how it should look. Strauss et al (2012) argue that the 'future work self' is responsive to relevant feedback which should encourage greater motivation. However, the DTs did not appear to have a platform in which to receive feedback and the feedback that was available (for example, numbers of LAC) was unpredictable. Practising without an available concrete image of hopes and goals therefore appeared to hinder how proactive DTs were in developing their role.

Peake (2006) states that:

> *When one examines the role of the designated teacher in a highly polished mirror, there are blemishes that can adversely affect the usefulness of the role* (p. 113)

One factor cited that can impact on DTs' abilities to support LAC is the level of support that they themselves are given. Within this study the most cited source of

support was from professionals external to the school system. The DTs spoke about the importance of having external support easily available so that when they needed it they knew it would be there. This is similar to the findings from Fletcher-Campbell et al (2003) where the DTs portrayed a sense of confidence regarding knowing where they could access support. This (perhaps atypical) certainty appeared to bring reassurance that in times of crisis the DT would not be working alone, but would have practical support that would influence their actions, and perhaps the actions of others.

Fletcher-Campbell et al (2003) found that half of the DTs sampled had not attended any specific training regarding their role or the needs of LAC. Since this time the role has been put on a statutory footing and the guidance explicitly states that it is the responsibility of LA professionals to provide appropriate training to DTs (DCSF, 2010). It is encouraging to hear that all of the DTs had attended LA training, however the appropriateness, relevance and value of this appears to have been questioned. This is similar to the findings from Fletcher-Campbell et al (2003) and suggests that although the weight given to the DT role has progressed since this time, the usefulness of LA training may not have progressed at such a rate and in fact, little attention appears to have been paid to the delivery or intended outcomes. The findings from this study suggest that it is desperately important for training to be applicable and mirror developing competence levels and therefore a 'one size fits all' approach does not seem appropriate. Although Berridge et al (2009) argues that DTs want access to more training, the findings from this study suggest that it is not necessarily more training which should be viewed as the main priority. Instead, in the first instance, the focus should be on ensuring that the training that is delivered is relevant to individual DTs' needs.

The guidance on LA training does not specify which professionals would be best placed to deliver these events. However, BPS (2006) argues that SEPs should have the specialist skills, knowledge and experience needed to assist, and these professionals therefore appear to have an important role. Bradbury (2006) interviewed three SEPs and highlighted that providing training to DTs was regarded as significantly important. However, this was not expanded upon and therefore the topics covered within these training sessions remained unclear, as did the designing

process. The findings from this study suggest that LA training needs to be developed collaboratively with DTs to ensure that topics covered are tailored to meet the needs of specific DT audiences. The SEP could therefore support and guide DTs to identify personal points for development and it is these that should scaffold the development of training.

Norwich et al (2010) found that a number of EPs supported DTs to explore the emotional aspects and demands of being a DT through consultation. The findings from this current research would suggest that it is indeed an emotionally demanding role, however none of the DTs spoke about receiving emotional support from external professionals. Scaife (2009) outlines different areas of focus for support and although specifically referring to supervision, these ideas also appear applicable here. With regard to Scaife's (2009) framework the DTs appeared to receive practical support to facilitate their thinking and planning, however they did not receive support to help them reflect on their actions or their feelings. There therefore appears to be some important focuses for support missing which could be valuable in helping DTs to manage the complexities of their role. This appears even more important considering that a number of DTs benefited from talking through their experiences as part of the interview process and having this platform allowed them to become more aware of their practice and plan next steps for role development which had previously been unconsidered.

This research suggests that DTs could benefit from support not only to develop their knowledge and skills, but also to develop their role clarity and practice as a DT. Although it has been highlighted that the SEP should be able to share information from research regarding good practice (BPS, 2006), little of this exists surrounding the DT role and it is therefore difficult to gain an insider's perspective in order to specifically support with role development. However, the development of competence over time may suggest that experienced DTs are better placed than other professionals to support DTs with little experience. This practice would be similar to Vygotsky's (1978) concept of a 'more knowledgeable other' where people are able to extend their skills and abilities through interacting with others who already possess them. Ofsted (2012) highlight that this practice does exist and identified one LA where experienced DTs delivered training to newly appointed DTs. The findings

from the research would advocate for such an approach, however without a current DT network this does not appear to be readily adoptable. Bradbury (2006) highlights the role that one SEP played in facilitating group problem-solving between DTs. This approach appears extremely pertinent as it has the benefits of encouraging DTs to share knowledge and collectively problem-solve, but it also incorporates the role of an external professional which is something that the DTs appeared to rely upon to support them in their development.

Chapter 6: Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the main conclusions from the research and discuss the potential limitations. I will also consider how the findings can translate into recommendations for practice and future research into the area.

Conclusions

This study aimed to gain an insight into DTs' experiences of supporting LAC in order to increase awareness, knowledge and understanding surrounding their unique perspectives. The research was initiated and appeared important due to the lack of previous research in this area. The largest qualitative study involving DTs was conducted before the role became statutory (Fletcher-Campbell et al, 2003) and since this time researchers have either focused on exploring other peoples' views of the role (for example, APPG, 2012) or exploring DTs' views as part of a broader endeavour (for example, investigating PEPs (Hayden, 2005) and exploring the role of the VH (Ofsted, 2012; Berridge et al, 2009)).

The DT role appears to be complex and multifaceted, however a number of key themes emerged from the interpretative analysis regarding their experiences of supporting LAC. It was apparent that the DTs needed to demonstrate a certain level of personal commitment and resilience in order to support LAC and overcome the barriers challenging this pursuit. The DTs emphasised the need for LAC to have support in school by sharing their insights into the vulnerability of these children and young people. This led a number of the DTs to demonstrate a strong emotional investment and connection to LAC. There was the sense that the DT role can be emotionally demanding and a range of positive and negative emotions were experienced, often leading to DTs riding an emotional rollercoaster. Due to this and a number of other challenges such as balancing the workload, working with systems that were not perceived to be fit for purpose and feeling accountable, the DTs needed to demonstrate a certain level of resilience in order to persevere. Coping strategies

were employed to support with this but most tended to be problem-focused (for example, prioritising and delegating) rather than emotion-focused (for example, seeking emotional support). Only one of the DTs adapted systems to complement his practice and the rest appeared to be working without feelings of self-efficacy and with an external locus of control.

The DTs ranged in their experiences of working collaboratively with, or independently for, LAC and different levels of LAC participation were apparent. A number of the DTs supported LAC to have a voice and influence, however the age of LAC was cited as the main barrier to ensuring this. Although one of the key responsibilities of the DT is to act as an advocate (DCSF, 2009c) it was apparent that not all of the DTs had the knowledge, skills and resources to adopt this position. Many of the DTs positioned their responsibilities as causing a dilemma to the identity development of LAC. They were aware that LAC do not want to be singled out, however, they had statutory responsibilities to fulfil. This meant that they had to strive for a balance between supporting enough and supporting too much.

The DTs placed a great emphasis on working with others in order to support LAC to achieve positive outcomes. To facilitate this they highlighted the need to spend time forming relationships with key stakeholders through contact, time and the demonstration of inter-personal skills. DTs experienced these relationships as important to ensure effective channels of communication and therefore information sharing. Without having holistic information many of the DTs felt like they were unable to achieve their responsibilities. It appears that the DTs relied heavily on foster carers to alleviate pressure and many regarded support as a two way process where foster carers help support education and DTs help support home life. The DTs appeared to go this extra mile because they placed such an importance on LAC achieving stability as this brought predictability and safety to them too. Although adopting a multi-agency approach was important, many of the DTs found this increasingly difficult when LAC were living outside of their originating LA.

The DTs often appeared to be working on the margins and experienced a sense of isolation and invisibility, as well as a lack of power and control. Many did not adopt a separate professional identity as a DT and this identity development was not

facilitated by colleagues within the schools systems who failed to recognise their responsibilities. Due to the lack of DT contact, a group identity had not been formed either which led to a lack of role clarity and a sense of mystery surrounding the role. The DTs often appeared to be forgotten by social work professionals and this led to blurred role boundaries and DTs apparently working beyond their remit. This caused many DTs to question the ethos of these LA professionals and the importance they placed on the role of school staff in the lives of LAC. Although the DTs appeared to fight for recognition, feelings of being powerless to promote change were apparent.

The DT role appears to be unstable and can easily vary depending on factors such as the number of LAC on roll and their individual needs. A number of the DTs did not appear proactive in preparing for their future responsibilities and it has been argued that this could be related to the unpredictability and therefore difficulties in imagining what the role in the future could and should look like. All of the DTs placed an importance on having support from external professionals. It was apparent that this needed to be readily available and something which the DTs could rely upon with certainty in order for it to be viewed as beneficial. All of the DTs discussed the importance of LA training in order to refresh and update their knowledge, however due to developing competence over time a "one size fits all" approach did not appear to be relevant or useful to the DTs. It also became apparent that many of the DTs needed support in order to reflect on their responsibilities and identify points for development. However, this reflective space was not usually available and many of the DTs appeared to have benefited from having the opportunity to explore their thoughts and feelings as part of the interview process.

Limitations

Limitations of IPA as an approach have been considered and discussed in the methodology chapter and this section will extend that discussion in order to outline a number of potential limitations which appear pertinent to this study.

It has been acknowledged that I took an active role in the research process and in interpreting the findings. I have recognised that I cannot completely bracket my

personal preconceptions, however I have aimed to adopt a reflective and reflexive approach to the research. Transparency has also been aimed for by identifying my positionality, outlining the procedures and presenting transcript extracts in order to allow the reader to reflect on my interpretations and consider possible alternatives. However, even though extracts have been included, it is recognised that they appear out of context and can therefore lack depth (Potter & Hepburn, 2005).

This research involved a small sample size and therefore the results are not readily generalisable. However, as I recognise that these findings are context specific, the aim was to focus on the potential transferability of the findings to other groups and contexts. To facilitate with this I have provided information regarding the LA context and the DTs who participated. It is hoped this will support the reader with judging the applicability of the findings and the possible implications for their own practice (termed theoretical generalisability (Smith et al, 2009)).

The homogeneity of the sample could be questioned due to including DTs from both primary and secondary schools. Although the reasons behind this decision were highlighted in the methodology chapter, I did not feel able to compare DTs' experiences from primary and secondary schools during the analysis process to identify if potential commonalities and differences did exist. This was due to the small sample size and Smith et al (2009) highlight that a comparative study should include at least five participants in each group. I am also aware that I did not account for the other roles held by the DTs within their schools and this could have again impacted on the homogeneity of the sample. However, I did not feel able to consider this factor due to the relatively small sample population and the low response rate for the pilot focus group.

The self-selecting method of sampling should also be considered when discussing the potential limitations of the research. Although this method of sampling supported with ensuring that the experiences investigated were of significance to the participants (as is most appropriate when adopting IPA (Smith et al, 2009)), it is possible that I have interviewed DTs who are more engaged with their role and more motivated to fulfilling their responsibilities. This is something that should therefore be recognised when considering the possible transferability of the findings.

Recommendations for Practice

Although each DT had unique experiences of supporting LAC, a number of key themes emerged from the interpretative analysis. When considering these in relation to the literature, a number of implications for practice can be tentatively suggested in relation to the role of school staff and LA professionals (for example, EPs and VHs). It is anticipated that through supporting and strengthening the DT role, holistic outcomes for LAC can be improved.

It appears that there are a number of personal qualities that DTs need to possess in order to succeed in the role and senior leaders in school should have regard to these when deciding who would be the best person to adopt the role. It appears not only important for DTs to have an interest, a certain level of commitment and strong inter-personal skills, but they also need to demonstrate resilience and be able to draw upon a number of protective factors to promote this. Simply possessing motivation and an emotional investment could make DTs vulnerable to succumb to the numerous demands and challenges.

DTs need to be given time to devote to supporting LAC and also to receiving support themselves. One of the significant challenges to fulfilling the responsibilities was the need to balance these with numerous other responsibilities. A fixed amount of time allocated to the DT role in general may not be appropriate and instead this should be considered in relation to the number of LAC on roll, the needs of the LAC on roll and the needs of the DT.

DTs may need support to publicise their role both to colleagues within schools and to wider professionals such as social workers. EPs could have a role in supporting this, however they themselves may also need to increase their knowledge regarding the role. This research highlights the need for an empathic view and EPs therefore need an insight into the many barriers and obstacles that can hinder DT productiveness and heighten their frustration. EPs could discuss the DT role and responsibilities at planning meetings where pieces of work are prioritised. This could support with raising awareness and highlighting what EPs can offer to support DTs. EPs could deliver joint training with DTs to school staff in order to increase

awareness of the DT role and the needs of LAC. The emotionally demanding nature of the DT role has also been highlighted and EPs appear well placed to offer supervision or consultation sessions with DTs to help reflect on, process and overcome challenges both emotionally and practically.

EPs could increase their attendance at PEP meetings to help ensure these meetings are practically useful and therefore impact on the outcomes for LAC. EP contribution could support with emphasising the importance of education, a child centred approach and LAC participation. The involvement of EPs in PEP meetings also appears relevant due to their in-depth knowledge of school systems, child development, appropriate target setting, practical strategies, problem-solving frameworks and multi-agency working. During these meetings, EPs could facilitate conversations to support with moving multi-agency working from a co-operative level to a more collaborative level which would involve sharing hypotheses about what may be influencing a certain situation and devising a joint plan of action.

LA training for DTs needs to be relevant and applicable to ensure that it facilitates knowledge development and therefore enhances practice. It appears important to listen to the views of DTs when devising training and the training delivered needs to be flexible rather than a "one size fits all approach". This could include offering different levels of training (for example, new starters and more experienced), delivering a rolling programme of different topics (for example, five training sessions per year focusing on different areas and the DTs decide which ones they want to attend) or having different workshops at each training event. Joint training for DTs and social workers may also be useful to increase knowledge, awareness, positive relationships and reciprocal empathic understanding regarding both roles.

DTs may benefit from training regarding LAC participation, voice and influence. DTs may need enlightening on the importance of this and therefore what the benefits are of working collaboratively with LAC. It appears important for DTs to include LAC in discussions regarding what information is shared about them, who information is shared with and why information may need sharing. Additionally, DTs should support LAC to participate in the decision making process surrounding what additional support may be beneficial in school and how this may be delivered

so that they are not made to stand out or feel different in any way. It appears important to give LAC control over the format in which their views are communicated and EPs have in-depth knowledge regarding the use of creative approaches and tools used to elicit the views of children, young people and those with SEN. They could therefore have a role in supporting DTs to increase their knowledge and skills in this area. It may also be appropriate for training to explore the role of an advocate and, in order for DTs to be able to adopt this position, they may need additional training on the rights of LAC.

DT networks or communities should be created and publicised as good practice. Having this platform could allow DTs to form a group identity and share good practice, therefore facilitating the development of greater role clarity and role effectiveness. Seeing the practice of others may also support with setting goals for development and increasing self-efficacy. Developing DT communities would complement the developing nature of the role as it would allow experienced DTs to interact with and support less experienced DTs. Professionals within the LA may need to support with the development of these networks and EPs could act as a facilitator to group consultation and group problem-solving sessions.

LA professionals should continue to consider how communication and support can be improved when children are living outside of their originating LA. This could involve closer liaison between VHs and consequently VHs and DTs.

The role and responsibilities of the VH should be made clear to all DTs. It appears important for VHs to act as an advocate for DTs, as well as facilitate positive channels of communication between them and other professionals. The VH should have a role in supporting social workers to place a greater emphasis on the importance of education and working collaboratively with DTs. The VH could also increase feelings of self-efficacy amongst DTs by taking their concerns seriously and supporting them to overcome these.

Recommendations for Future Research

The current study aimed to enhance understanding regarding DTs' broad experiences of supporting LAC. I think this research has highlighted how important and influential it can be to conduct in-depth research with DTs and, considering their views have previously been neglected, future research in this area appears important to aid empathic understanding and overall strengthening of the role. Now there is more foundational knowledge, future researchers could focus on deeper explorations of DTs' views regarding particular aspects of the role. For example, it may be interesting to investigate what skills and knowledge DTs think they need to possess in order to be successful and what facilitates the development of these. This information could support school staff when considering who would be the best person to adopt the role and also inform aspects of the LA training.

It may be interesting to explore the transferability of these findings in order to gain an understanding of how well the claims are supported by other DTs. As this research was conducted in a relatively large, rural and affluent authority, similar research could be conducted in other LAs which have different demographics and different structures of support in place for DTs and LAC. Conducting comparative research may also be informative, for example, researchers could investigate whether experiences do vary depending on the type of school a DT works within. It may also be useful to see whether the other roles fulfilled by a DT (for example, special educational needs co-ordinator or head teacher) have an impact and this may again help inform who is best placed to fulfill the responsibilities.

It may be useful to implement and then investigate the impact of some of the recommendations suggested as part of this research. For example, it may be useful to explore the usefulness of DT networks or group problem-solving sessions with DTs. Additionally, and due to DTs developing competence over time, a longitudinal study could be conducted in order to investigate how DTs develop and change, and what supports with this.

Conversely, it may be interesting to conduct in-depth explorations regarding the views of other people who interact with DTs to gain an understanding of how they

view the role. For example, research with LAC and foster carers surrounding what they think makes a helpful DT and what they think DTs are and could be doing to help support them. Research could also be conducted with VHs with the sole priority of gaining an understanding of how they support DTs and what factors facilitate and hinder this.

Reflective Box:

Engaging in this research has been personally rewarding as I feel my knowledge and research skills have increased immensely, however I have also found it quite challenging at times (particularly during the analysis process). I would relate the emotional impact to the 'emotional rollercoaster' that many of the DTs appeared to be riding. My interest in the DT role has continued to gain momentum throughout the research process and I think this will continue to progress during my EP practice. I feel fortunate to have gained an in-depth insight into DTs' experiences and I have developed a very empathic stance. I think this will help me in my EP practice as I now have a better understanding of how I can support DTs and therefore hopefully improve the outcomes for LAC.

References

Atwool, N. (2006). Attachment and Resilience: Implications for Children in Care. *Child Care in Practice,* 12, 315-330.

Aultman, L. P., Williams-Johnson, M. R., & Schutz, P. A. (2009). Boundary dilemmas in teacher-student relationships: Struggling with "the line". *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 25, 636-646.

Bandura, A. (1982). Self-Efficacy Mechanism in Human Agency. *American Psychologist,* 37, 122-147.

Barnardo's. (2006). *Failed By The System: The views of young care leavers on their educational experiences.* Retrieved September 21, 2012 from http://www.barnardos.org.uk/failed_by_the_system_report.pdf

Beauchamp, C., & Thomas, L. (2009). Understanding teacher identity: an overview of issues in the literature and implications for teacher education. *Cambridge Journal of Education,* 39, 175-189.

Beltman, S., Mansfield, C., & Price, A. (2011). Thriving not just surviving: A review of research on teacher resilience. *Educational Research Review,* 6, 185-207.

Berridge, D. (2012). Educating young people in care: What have we learned? *Children and Youth Services Review,* 34, 1171-1175.

Berridge, D., Henry, L., Jackson, S., & Turney, D. (2009). *Looked After and Learning: Evaluation of the Virtual School Head Pilot.* Annesley: DCSF Publications.

Billington, T. (2006). *Working with Children: Assessment, Representation and Intervention.* London: SAGE.

Bomber, L. (2007). *Inside I'm Hurting: Practical Strategies for Supporting Children with Attachment Difficulties in Schools.* London: Worth Publishing.

Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss: Volume 1. Attachment.* New York: Basic Books.

Bradbury, S. (2006). Corporate Parenting: A discussion of the educational psychologist's role. *Educational Psychology in Practice,* 22, 141-158.

British Psychological Society. (2006). *Report of the Working Group on Educational Psychology Service Practice with Looked After Children.* Leicester: BPS.

British Psychological Society. (2010). *Code of Human Research Ethics.* Leicester: BPS.

Brocki, J. M. & Wearden, A. J. (2006). A critical evaluation of the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) in health psychology, *Psychology and Health,* 21, 87-108.

Brooks, R., & Goldstein, S. (2008). The Mindset of Teachers Capable of Fostering Resilience in Students. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology,* 23, 114-126.

Burr, V. (2003). *Social Constructionism* (2nd ed.). East Sussex: Routledge.

Cameron, R. J., & Maginn, C. (2011). Living psychology: The 'emotional warmth' dimension of professional childcare. *Educational and Child Psychology,* 28, 44-62.

Carter, S. M., & Little, M. (2007). Justifying Knowledge, Justifying Method, Taking Action: Epistemologies, Methodologies, and Methods in Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Health Research,* 17, 1316-1328.

Carver, C. S., & Connor-Smith, J. (2010). Personality and Coping. *Annual Review of Psychology,* 61, 679-704.

Castro, A. J., Kelly, J., & Shih, M. (2010). Resilience strategies for new teachers in high-needs areas. *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 26, 622-629.

Chamberlain, K. (2011). Troubling methodology. *Health Psychology Review,* 5, 48-54.

Coman, W., & Devaney, J. (2011). Reflecting on Outcomes for Looked-after Children: An Ecological Perspective. *Child Care in Practice,* 17, 37-53.

Comfort, R. L. (2007). For the love of learning: Promoting educational achievement for looked after and adopted children. *Adoption and Fostering,* 31, 28-34.

Coulling, N. (2000). Definitions of successful education for the 'looked after' child: A multi-agency perspective. *Support for Learning,* 15, 30-35.

Crittenden, P. M., & Dallos, R. (2009). All in the family: Integrating attachment and family system theories. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry,* 14, 389-409.

Day, C., & Kington, A. (2008). Identity, well-being and effectiveness: the emotional contexts of teaching. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society,* 16, 7-23.

Day, C., & Leitch, R. (2001). Teachers' and teacher educators' lives: the role of emotion. *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 17, 403-415.

Day, C., Kington, A., Stobart, G., & Sammons, P. (2006). The personal and professional selves of teachers: stable and unstable identities. *British Educational Research Journal,* 32, 601-616.

Day, A., Riebschleger, J., Dworsky, A., Damashek, A., & Fogarty, K. (2012). Maximising educational opportunities for youth aging out of foster care by engaging youth voices in a partnership for social change. *Children and Youth Services Review,* 34, 1007-1014.

Dent, R. J., & Cameron, S. (2003). Developing Resilience in Children who are in Public Care: The educational psychology perspective. *Educational Psychology in Practice,* 19, 3-19.

Department for Children, Schools and Families. (2008). *Children and Young Persons Act 2008.* Retrieved November 10, 2012 from http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/23/contents

Department for Children, Schools and Families. (2009a). *Improving the attainment of looked after children in primary schools: Guidance for schools.* Annesley: DCSF Publications.

Department for Children, Schools and Families. (2009b). *Improving the attainment of looked after children in secondary schools: Guidance for schools.* Annesley: DCSF Publications.

Department for Children, Schools and Families. (2009c). *The role and responsibilities of the designated teacher for looked after children: Statutory guidance for school governing bodies.* Annesley: DCSF Publications.

Department for Children, Schools and Families. (2010). *Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities.* Annesley: DCSF Publications

Department for Children, Schools and Families/ Department of Health. (2009). *Statutory Guidance on Promoting the Health and Well-being of Looked After Children.* Annesley: DCSF Publications.

Department for Education. (2010). *The Importance of Teaching.* Norwich: The Stationary Office.

Department for Education. (2013a). *Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2013.* Retrieved January 11, 2014 from
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/24487 2/SFR36_2013.pdf.

Department for Education. (2013b). *Outcomes for Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England, as at 31 March 2013.* Retrieved January 11, 2014 from
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/26438 5/SFR50_2013_Text.pdf.

Department for Education. (2014). *Children and Families Act 2014.* Norwich: The Stationary Office.

Department for Education and Skills. (2004a). *Children Act 2004.* Retrieved September 21, 2012 from http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/contents

Department for Education and Skills. (2004b). *Every Child Matters: Change for Children.* Annesley: DfES Publications.

Department for Education and Skills. (2006). *Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care.* Norwich: The Stationary Office.

Department for Education and Skills. (2007). *Care Matters: Time for Change.* Norwich: The Stationary Office.

Department of Health. (1989). *Children Act 1989.* Retrieved September 21, 2012 from http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents

Department of Health/ Department for Education and Employment. (2000). *Young People in Public Care: Guidance.* London: DfEE Publications.

Dixon, J. (2008). Young people leaving care: health, well-being and outcomes. *Child and Family Social Work,* 13, 207-217.

Driscoll, J. (2011). Making up lost ground: Challenges in supporting the educational attainment of looked after children beyond Key Stage 4. *Adoption and Fostering,* 35, 18-31.

Driscoll, J. (2013). Supporting the educational transitions of looked after children at Key Stage 4: the role of virtual schools and designated teachers. *Journal of Children's Services,* 8, 110-122.

Elliott, R., Fischer, C. T., & Rennie, D. L. (1999). Evolving guidelines for publication of qualitative research studies in psychology and related fields. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology,* 38, 215-229.

Feuerstein, R., Klein, P. S., & Tannenbaum, A. J. (1991). *Mediated Learning Experience (MLE): Theoretical, Psychosocial and Learning Implications.* London: Freund.

Fletcher-Campbell, F., Archer, T., & Tomlinson, K. (2003). *The Role of the School in Supporting the Education of Children in Public Care.* Annesley: DfES Publications.

Flores, M. A., & Day, C. (2006). Contexts which shape and reshape new teachers' identities: A multi-perspective study. *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 22, 219-232.

Francis, J. (2000). Investing in children's futures: enhancing the educational arrangements of 'looked after' children and young people. *Child and Family Social Work,* 5, 23-33.

Gadamer, H. (1960/1975). *Truth and Method* (Trans. G. Barden & J. Cumming). London: Sheed & Ward.

Giorgi, A. (1992). Description versus Interpretation: Competing Alternative Strategies for Qualitative Research. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology,* 23, 119-135.

Giorgi, A. (1997). The theory, practice, and evaluation of the phenomenological method as a qualitative research procedure. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology,* 28, 235-260.

Golafshani, N. (2003). Understanding Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research. *The Qualitative Report,* 8 (4), 597-607.

Goodman, R. (1997). The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire: A Research Note. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry,* 38, 581-586.

Gu, Q., & Day, C. (2007). Teachers resilience: A necessary condition for effectiveness. *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 23, 1302-1316.

Hanewald, R. (2011). Reviewing the Literature on "At-Risk" and Resilient Children and Young People. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education,* 36(2), 15-29.

Harding, E., & Atkinson, C. (2009). How EPs record the voice of the child. *Educational Psychology in Practice,* 25, 125-137.

Hare, A. D., & Bullock, R. (2006). Dispelling Misconceptions about Looked after Children. *Adoption & Fostering,* 30, 26-35.

Harker, R. M., Dobel-Ober, D., Lawrence, J., Berridge, D., & Sinclair, R. (2003). Who Takes Care of Education? Looked after children's perceptions of support for educational progress. *Child and Family Social Work,* 8, 89-100.

Harker, R. M., Dobel-Ober, D., Berridge, D., & Sinclair, R. (2004). More Than the Sum of its Parts? Inter-professional Working in the Education of Looked After Children. *Children and Society,* 18, 179-193.

Hart, R. A. (1992). *Children's Participation: From tokenism to citizenship.* Florence: UNICEF.

Hayden, C. (2005). More than a piece of paper?: Personal education plans and 'looked after' children in England. *Child and Family Social Work,* 10, 343-352.

Head, B. W. (2011). Why not ask them? Mapping and promoting youth participation. *Children and Youth Services Review,* 33, 541-547.

Hefferon, K., & Gil-Rodriguez, E. (2011). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. *The Psychologist,* 24, 756-759.

Heidegger, M. (1927/1962). *Being and Time* (Trans. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson). Oxford: Blackwell.

HM Inspectorate of Prisons. (2011). *The care of looked after children in custody: A short thematic review.* London: HM Inspectorate of Prisons.

Honey, K. L., Rees, P., & Griffey, S. (2011). Investigating self-perceptions and resilience in Looked After Children. *Educational Psychology in Practice,* 27, 37-52.

Hughes, M. (2006). Multi-agency teams: Why should working together make everything better? *Educational and Child Psychology,* 23, 60-71.

Husserl, E. (1900/1970). *Logical Investigations* (Trans. J.N. Findlay). New York: Humanities Press.

Husserl, E. (1936/1970). *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Trans. D. Carr). Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Hymans, M. (2008). How personal constructs about "professional identity" might act as a barrier to multi-agency working. *Educational Psychology in Practice,* 24, 279-288.

Jackson, S., & Cameron, C. (2012). Leaving care: Looking ahead and aiming higher. *Children and Youth Services Review,* 34, 1107-1114.

Jaegar, M. E., & Rosnow, R. L. (1988). Contextualism and its implications for psychological inquiry. *British Journal of Psychology,* 79, 63-75.

Kvale, S. (2007). *Doing Interviews.* London: SAGE publications.

Langdridge, D. (2007). *Phenomenological Psychology: Theory, Research and Method.* Essex: Pearson Education Limited.

Larkin, M., Eatough, V., & Osborn, M. (2011). Interpretative phenomenological analysis and embodied, active, situated cognition. *Theory Psychology,* 21, 318-337.

Larkin, M., Watts, S., & Clifton, E. (2006). Giving voice and making sense in interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology,* 3, 102-120.

Leeson, C. (2007). My life in care: experiences of non-participation in decision-making processes. *Child and Family Social Work,* 12, 268-277.

Lewis, A. (2002). Accessing, through research interviews, the views of children with difficulties in learning. *Support for Learning,* 17(3), 110-116.

Luke, N., & Banerjee, R. (2012). Maltreated Children's Social Understanding and Empathy: A Preliminary Exploration of Foster Carer' Perspectives. *Journal of Child and Family Studies,* 21, 237-246.

Maclay, F., Bunce, M., & Purves, D. P. (2006). Surviving the system as a foster carer. *Adoption and Fostering,* 30, 29-38.

Madigan, S., Quayle, E., Cossar, J., & Paton, K. (2013). Feeling the same or feeling different? An analysis of the experiences of young people in foster care. *Adoption & Fostering,* 37, 389-403.

Madill, A., Jordan, A., & Shirley, C. (2000). Objectivity and reliability in qualitative analysis: Realist, contextualist and radical constructionist epistemologies. *British Journal of Psychology,* 91, 1-20.

Mantzoukas, S. (2004). Issues of Representation Within Qualitative Inquiry. *Qualitative Health Research,* 14, 994-1007.

Martin, P. Y., & Jackson, S. (2002). Educational success for children in public care: advice from a group of high achievers. *Child and Family Social Work,* 7, 121-130.

Masten, A. S., Best, K. M., & Garmezy, N. (1990). Resilience and development: Contributions from the study of children who overcome adversity. *Development and Psychopathology,* 2, 425-444.

McAuley,C., & Davis, T. (2009). Emotional well-being and mental health of looked after children in England. *Child and Family Social Work,* 14, 147-155.

McMurray, I., Connolly, H., Preston-Shoot, M., & Wigley, V. (2011). Shards of the old looking glass: restoring the significance of identity in promoting positive outcomes for looked-after children. *Child and Family Social Work,* 16, 210-218.

McParlin, P. (1996). Children 'Looked after' (in Care) - Implications for Educational Psychologists. *Educational Psychology in Practice,* 12 (2), 112-117.

Meltzer, H., Corbin, T., Gatward, R., Goodman, R., & Ford, T. (2003). *The mental health of young people looked after by local authorities in England.* London: Office for National Statistics

Millward, R., Kennedy, E., Towlson, K., & Minnis, H. (2006). Reactive attachment disorder in looked-after children. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties,* 11, 273-279.

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. (2010). *Promoting the Quality of life of Looked-After Children and Young People.* London: NICE Publications.

Norwich, B., Richards, A., & Nash, T. (2010). Educational Psychologists and Children in Care: Practices and Issues. *Educational Psychology in Practice,* 26 (4), 375-390.

Ofsted. (2010). *Children's care monitor 2010.* Manchester: Ofsted.

Ofsted. (2012). *The impact of virtual schools on the educational progress of looked after children.* Manchester: Ofsted.

Ofsted. (2014). *From a distance: looked after children living away from their home area.* Manchester: Ofsted.

Oke, N., Rostill-Brookes, H., & Larkin, M. (2013). Against the odds: Foster carers' perceptions of family, commitment and belonging in successful placements. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry,* 18, 7-24.

Oliver, C., Knight, A., & Candappa, M. (2006). *Advocacy for looked after children and children in need: achievements and challenges.* London: Thomas Coram Research Unit.

Osborne, C., Norgate, R., & Traill, M. (2009). The role of the educational psychologist in multidisciplinary work relating to fostering and adoption. *Adoption & Fostering,* 33, 13-25.

Peake, A. (2006). 'Like Highly Polished Mirrors': Educational Psychology and Support for the Education of Looked After and Adopted Children. In Golding, K., Dent, H., Nissim, R., & Stott, L. (Eds.). *Thinking Psychologically About Children Who Are Looked After and Adopted: Space for Reflection* (pp. 98-127). East Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Pidgeon, N., & Henwood, K. (1997). Using grounded theory in psychological research. In N. Hayes (Ed.) *Doing Qualitative Analysis in Psychology.* Hove: Psychology Press.

Potter, J., & Hepburn, A. (2005). Qualitative Interviews in Psychology: Problems and Possibilities, *Qualitative Research in Psychology,* 2, 1-27.

Pringle, J., Drummond, J., McLafferty, E., & Hendry, E. (2011). Interpretative phenomenological analysis: a discussion and critique. *Nurse Researcher,* 18, 20-24.

Reid, K., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2005). Exploring lived experience. *The Psychologist,* 18, 20-23.

Ricoeur, P. (1970). *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation.* London: Yale University Press.

Rogers, C. (1951). *Client-Centered Therapy: Its Current Practice, Implications and Theory.* London: Constable.

Rose, J. (2011). Dilemmas of Inter-Professional Collaboration: Can they be Resolved? *Children & Society,* 25, 151-163.

Rotter, J. B. (1966). Generalized Expectancies for Internal Versus External Control of Reinforcement. *Psychological Monographs: General and Applied,* 80, 1-28.

Roulston, K. (2010). Considering Quality in Qualitative Interviewing. *Qualitative Research,* 10 (2), 199-228.

Rutter, M. (1987). Psychosocial resilience and protective mechanisms. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry,* 57, 316-331.

Scaife, J. M. (2009). *Supervision in Clinical Practice: A Practitioners Guide* (2nd ed.). East Sussex: Routledge.

Schleirmacher, F. (1998). *Hermeneutics and Criticism and other Writings* (Trans. A. Bowie). Cambridge: CUP.

Shier, H. (2001). Pathways to Participation: Openings, Opportunities and Obligations. *Children & Society,* 15, 107-117.

Skinner, E. A., Edge, K., Altman, J., & Sherwood, H. (2003). Searching for the Structure of Coping: A Review and Critique of Category Systems for Classifying Ways of Coping. *Psychological Bulletin,* 129, 216-269.

Sloper, P. (2004). Facilitators and barriers for co-ordinated multi-agency services. *Child: Care, Health and Development,* 30, 571-580.

Smith, J. A. (1996). Beyond the divide between cognition and discourse: using interpretative phenomenological analysis in health psychology. *Psychology and Health,* 11, 261-271.

Smith, J. A. (2004). Reflecting on the development of interpretative phenomenological analysis and its contribution to qualitative research in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology,* 1, 39-54.

Smith, J. A. (2007). Hermeneutics, human sciences and health: linking theory and practice. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being,* 2, 3-11.

Smith, J. A. (2011). Evaluating the contribution of interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Health Psychology Review,* 5, 9-27.

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research.* London: Sage.

Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2008). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J.A. Smith (Ed.) *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Methods* (2nd ed). London: Sage.

Strauss, K., Griffin, M. A., & Parker, S. K. (2012). Future Work Selves: How Salient Hoped-For Identities Motivate Proactive Career Behaviors. *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 97, 580-598.

Sugden, E. J. (2013). Looked-after Children: what supports them to learn? *Educational Psychology in Practice,* 29, 367-382.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of inter-group behaviour. In S.Worchel & L. W. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations.* Chicago: Nelson-Hall.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers. (2012). *Education Matters in Care*: *A report by the independent cross-party inquiry into the educational attainment of looked after children in England.* Retrieved January 6, 2013 from http://www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/data/files/Education_Matters_in_Care_September_2012.pdf

Thomas, G. (2009). *How to do your Research Project.* London: Sage.

Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative Quality: Eight "Big-Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Inquiry,* 16, 837-851.

United Nations (1989). *The Convention of the Rights of the Child.* Brussels: the United Nations General Assembly.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in Society.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Willig, C. (2013). *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology* (3rd ed.). Berkshire: Open University Press.

Yardly, L. (2000). Dilemmas in Qualitative Health Research. *Psychology and Health,* 15, 215-228.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Local Authority Context

The LA within which this research was conducted would be described as being a large unitary authority. It is predominately rural in nature with a dispersed population over a large area, however there are some areas that would be considered more urban. It is generally described as an affluent area although there are some pockets that would be considered socially deprived. A large majority of the population are described as White British and although there is limited ethnic diversity, the minority ethnic population does appear to be growing.

At the time the research was conducted there were roughly 335 children 'looked after' by the LA, although only 250 were living within the authority. Of these, 150 were of compulsory school age. The number of children 'looked after' by the LA was just below the national average (that is, 53 LAC per 10,000 children compared to 60 LAC per 10,000 children). It was not known exactly how many LAC were placed within the authority by other LAs. Table nine shows the attainment of children 'looked after' by the LA in the academic year ending July 2013, compared to the national and local averages.

Table 9: Attainment Levels of LAC Compared to National and Local Averages

	LA Figures for LAC	National Figures for LAC	LA Figures for 'non-LAC'	National Figures for 'non-LAC'
Percent achieving National Curriculum Level 4 or higher (including English and Maths) at Key Stage 2	50%	50%	81%	79%
Percent achieving 5 GCSEs (grades A*-C, including English and Maths) at Key Stage 4	6%	15%	61%	58%

The figures for 'non-LAC' suggest that this LA is performing slightly above the national average with regard to attainment levels. The figures highlight the attainment gap between LAC and their peers on a local and national level. Locally, LAC at Key Stage 2 appear to be performing in line with the national LAC figures, however at Key Stage 4 they are clearly under-performing dramatically.

In regards to the educational needs of the LAC within this LA, roughly 60% were identified as having SEN, with roughly 19% having a statement of SEN. This compares to 69% of LAC nationally identified as having SEN, with roughly 29% having a statement of SEN. The number of LAC identified as having SEN within this LA is therefore lower than the national average. The percentage of LAC identified as having mental health difficulties (measured by the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) was also slightly below the national figures for LAC (34% and 38% respectively). The percentage of LAC receiving a permanent or at least one fixed term exclusion is comparable with national percentages. After

compulsory school age, roughly 88% go on to participate in education, employment or training which is higher than the national average of 66%.

The LA does not have a dedicated education service for LAC (although it has been suggested that most LAs do have a dedicated LAC team (DCSF, 2009c)). The VH has held the role for a number of years. His primary job title is the Assistant Director of Children's Services and although this position has the important benefits of power and influence (Berridge et al, 2009) it could be argued that with such a wide ranging remit, the time to dedicate to the VH role may be one of many competing priorities. Within the Education Welfare Service there are a number of Education Welfare Officers for LAC who support school staff through the PEP process and deliver annual DT training.

At the time of the interviews, the DT training was organised, funded and delivered by professionals working within the Education Welfare Service (EWS). A full day's training was offered annually with roughly the same content at each time of delivery. I had the opportunity to attend one of these events and the following topics were covered:

- PEPs: policy, procedures and guidance
- Personal Education Allowance: how to access and when to request
- Private fostering arrangements: statutory guidance regarding this practice
- Annual DT report to governors: what content should be included
- Working with children with attachment difficulties: delivered by the SEP for LAC.

Professionals working within the EWS highlighted that the training was mostly well received by DTs, however they acknowledged that variety regarding content was lacking. In line with the school funding reforms, as of September 2013 the DT training ceased to be funded by the LA and instead schools are now required to pay to attend. The structure, content and delivery of future events are currently being discussed by professionals within the EWS and the EP team.

Appendix 2: Ethical Approval Letter

The University Of Sheffield.

The School Of Education.

Danielle Goodall
DEdCPsy Programme

Head of School
Professor Cathy Nutbrown

School of Education
388 Glossop Road
Sheffield
S10 2JA

30 April 2018

Telephone: +44 (0)114 222 8167
Email: dedcpsy@sheffield.ac.uk

Dear Danielle,

ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER
An Interpretative Phenomenological Study of the Experience of being a Designated Teacher for Looked After Children.

Thank you for submitting your ethics application. I am writing to confirm that your application has now been approved.

We recommend you refer to the reviewers' additional comments (please see attached). You should discuss how you are going to respond to these comments with your supervisor BEFORE you proceed with your research.

This letter is evidence that your application has been approved and should be included as an Appendix in your final submission.

Good luck with your research.

Yours sincerely

Professor Dan Goodley
Chair of the School of Education Ethics Review Panel

cc   Kathryn Pomerantz

Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet

Introduction

As part of my doctoral training at The University of Sheffield I am undertaking a research project focusing on the views of designated teachers for looked after children. The title of this research project is:

Designated teachers' experiences of supporting looked after children

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

Purpose of the Research Project

The aim of this research project is to gain a more in-depth understanding of what it is like to be a designated teacher supporting looked after children in school. This will be done through listening to your thoughts, feelings, perceptions and reflections. I am interested in exploring your responsibilities, the factors that facilitate supporting looked after children and any dilemmas or difficulties that can arise. By doing this I think that other professionals can gain an increased understanding of the role and an insight into how it can be supported and strengthened to promote successful outcomes for looked after children. This is particularly pertinent to educational psychologists (especially the senior educational psychologist for looked after children) who design projects, provide training and share good practice surrounding meeting the needs of looked after children.

You have been chosen to participate in this research project as you meet the criteria for the sample population. I am hoping to speak to several designated teachers working in both primary and secondary schools. Unfortunately I am only able to speak to a limited number of people and so priority will be given to those who express an interest first.

It is up to you to decide if you would like to take part in this research project. To help you make an informed decision I will describe the research process in more detail. It is important to highlight at this point that even if you decide to take part (and sign the consent form) you can still withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

Participation

If you decide to take part I will contact you to arrange a convenient time, date and location for a one off, individual interview to take place. This interview should last roughly one hour. The interview will be semi-structured, which means that I will have some questions to ask based around your experiences of supporting looked after children, but you will be able to talk in-depth about what you think is relevant and important. You will only be expected to discuss information which you feel comfortable talking about.

Whilst there are no immediate gains for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that you may benefit from having a space to talk about your thoughts, feelings and experiences.

Confidentiality

All the information collected during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Your name or where you work will not be used in any reports or publications, instead each participant will be given a unique number by which they will be known. Only anonymised information will be shared with others.

The interviews will be audio recorded to aid with analysis. These audio recordings will not be used for any other purpose without your written permission. All the data (both audio and written) will be held and analysed by myself and destroyed after successful completion of the research project.

Additional Information

The findings of this research project will be written up in a thesis as part of my Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology course, which will be finalised around April 2014. It is also possible that in the future they will be included in a paper for publication. A summary of the results will also be fed back to colleagues working in the local authority, specifically within the educational psychology team, to aid with understanding and action planning.

This project has been ethically approved by the School of Education Department's ethics review procedure.

If you have any concerns regarding any aspect of the research process you can contact me directly. Additionally, if you would like to make a formal complaint at any point you can contact my research supervisor (please see below for contact details).

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

Danielle Goodall
Trainee Educational Psychologist

[Information has been removed to protect anonymity]

Research supervisor:

Dr Kathryn Pomerantz
Academic Director, Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology
School of Education, Sheffield University
388 Glossop Road
Sheffield
S10 2JA
E-mail: k.a.pomerantz@sheffield.ac.uk

I shall be contacting you shortly to find out if you would be interested in taking part in this research project. Thank you again for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Best wishes,

Danielle Goodall,
Trainee Educational Psychologist

The University Of Sheffield.

Appendix 4: Consent Form

Title of Project: Designated teachers' experiences of supporting looked after children

Name of Researcher: Danielle Goodall

Participant Identification Number for this project:

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information sheet for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.
   Contact number for researcher: ***** ******

3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.

4. I agree to take part in the above research project.

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____
Researcher   Date   Signature

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Copies: Participant
*   Research file*
Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form and participant information sheet. A copy of the signed and dated consent form will be placed in the project's main record, which is kept in a secure location.

Appendix 5: Designated Teacher Information

Designated Teacher One

DT one was a White British male working within a secondary school that was split over two sites. The school is described as being larger than average and has roughly 1630 pupils on roll. According to the Ofsted report, the overall effectiveness of the school is 'good'. The levels of attainment achieved are above average, the proportion of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium is well below average and the proportion identified as having SEN is below average. The majority of the pupils attending are White British and the community served by the school would be described as being affluent. At the time of the interview there were seven LAC on roll, therefore representing less than 1% of the school population. DT one has had the DT responsibility for roughly 11 years. He is also an assistant head teacher and a Science teacher.

Designated Teacher Two

DT two was a White British female working within a secondary school. The school is described as being smaller than average and has roughly 900 pupils on roll. According to the Ofsted report, the overall effectiveness of the school 'requires improvement'. The levels of attainment achieved are below average, the proportion of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium is average and the proportion identified as having SEN is average. The majority of the pupils attending are White British and the community served by the school would be described as being affluent. At the time of the interview there were 22 LAC on roll, therefore representing roughly 2% of the school population. DT two has had the DT responsibility for roughly 10 years. She is also the special educational needs co-ordinator and does not have any teaching responsibilities.

Designated Teacher Three

DT three was a white British female working within a primary school. The school is described as being larger than average and has roughly 420 pupils on roll. According

to the Ofsted report, the overall effectiveness of the school 'requires improvement'. The levels of attainment are below average, the proportion of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium is much higher than average and the proportion identified as having SEN is above average. The majority of the pupils attending are White British and the community served by the school would be described as being socially deprived. At the time of the interview there was one LAC on role, therefore representing less than 1% of the school population. DT three has had the DT responsibility for roughly three years. She is also the special educational needs co-ordinator and does not have any teaching responsibilities.

Designated Teacher Four

DT four was a white British female working within a primary school. The school is described as being smaller than average and has roughly 230 pupils on roll. According to the Ofsted report, the overall effectiveness of the school is 'good'. The levels of attainment achieved are above average, the proportion of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium is extremely small and the proportion identified as having SEN is below average. The majority of the pupils attending are White British and the community served by the school would be described as being affluent. At the time of the interview there were three LAC on roll, therefore representing roughly 1% of the school population. DT four has had the DT responsibility for roughly three years. She is also the head teacher and does not have any teaching responsibilities.

Designated Teacher Five

DT five was a white British female working within a primary school. The school is described as being larger than average and has roughly 390 pupils on roll. According to the Ofsted report, the overall effectiveness of the school 'requires improvement'. The levels of attainment are well below average, the proportion eligible for Pupil Premium is much higher than average and the proportion identified as having SEN is above average. The majority of the pupils attending are White British and the community served by the school would be described as being socially deprived. At the time of the interview there were four LAC on roll, therefore representing roughly 1% of the school population. DT five has had the DT responsibility for roughly nine

years and has fulfilled this role within three schools located in two different LAs. She is also the head teacher and does not have any teaching responsibilities.

Designated Teacher Six

DT six was a white British female working within a Catholic primary school. The school is described as being smaller than average and has roughly 210 pupils on roll. According to the Ofsted report, the overall effectiveness of the school is 'good'. The levels of attainment achieved are above average, the proportion of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium is below average and the proportion identified as having SEN is higher than average. The majority of the pupils attending are White British and the community served by the school would be described as being socially deprived. However, many pupils who attend do not reside within the local area. At the time of the interview there were 11 LAC on role, therefore representing roughly 5% of the school population. DT six has had the DT responsibility for roughly two years. She is also a co-head teacher and does not have any teaching responsibilities.

Appendix 6: Interview Schedule

Introduction:

- Revisit information contained within the Participant Information Sheet.
- Give participants time to ask any questions and sign the consent form.
- Discuss contextual information (for example, the number of pupils on roll, the number of LAC on roll, period of time fulfilling DT responsibilities, additional responsibilities within the school, the school context and community characteristics).

The aim of this interview is to gain an in-depth understanding of your experience of supporting LAC. I am interested in exploring your thoughts, feelings, perceptions and reflections. There are no right or wrong answers and I would like you to be as open and honest at possible. I may say very little because I am interested in listening to your views. Some questions may seem obvious but this is because I am interested in hearing your personal thoughts and feelings. Please take your time in thinking and talking.

Questions:

1. Can you tell me about how you came to get the responsibility of supporting LAC?
   - How was the role explained to you? By whom?
   - What did you expect the role to be like? What was the source of those expectations?

2. Can you tell me about the things that you do to help support LAC?
   - What do you think about these activities? How do you feel about doing these activities?
   - How does this compare to your previous expectations?

3. Can you tell me about your best experience of supporting LAC?
   - Are there any times when you feel positive about the work you do? Can you tell me about these.
   - Are there any aspects of your work that you enjoy? Call you tell me about these.
   - Are there any aspects of your work that you feel proud of? Can you tell me about these.

4. Can you tell me about your worst experience of supporting LAC?
   - Are there any times when you feel more negative about the work you do? Can you tell me about these.
   - Are there any aspects of your work that you do not enjoy? Can you tell me about these.

- Are there any aspects of your work that you feel disappointed about? Can you tell me about these.

5. What do you think other people think about the work you do to support LAC?
   - School staff, LAC, foster carers, professionals from external agencies?
   - What do you think about that? How does it make you feel?
   - Who notices/values the work you do?

6. From your experience, what factors help you to support LAC?

7. From your experience, what factors hinder you from supporting LAC?

8. Can you tell me about the support you receive to perform your role?
   - Internally from within the school? Externally from outside the school?
   - What support is of most benefit? Why?
   - Tell me about how you cope.
   - What additional support would be beneficial?

9. How would you like to see your role and responsibilities in the future?
   - What would you describe as a positive development? How can it be improved?
   - Is there anything else that you would like to do?
   - If you could change one thing about how your role works, what would it be?

10. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you think is an important part of your experience?

General Probes:

Why?
How?
Can you tell me more about that?
Tell me what you were thinking?
How did you feel?
What do you mean by...?
Can you give me an example of...?

Specific Probes:

What do you think about that in relation to your role in supporting LAC?
What does that mean for you/your work when supporting LAC?
How does that relate to/impact on/affect the work you do to support LAC?

Debrief:

- Thank the participant for taking the time to talk, very grateful
- Highlight again the information in the Participant Information Sheet about what will happen to the results and who to contact for further information.
- Emphasise to contact me if they want to discuss anything further.
- Ensure there is someone in school they can talk to if they need to.
- Time to process and reflect on the interview. How did they find it? Do they have any additional questions?
- Ask about whether they would like to receive information about the findings. How would they prefer this, face-to-face or electronic.

Appendix 7: Initial Reflections on the Interviews

<u>Designated Teacher One</u>

DT one was the first person to express an interest in taking part and he replied to the e-mail on the same day. When I arrived to meet him at the school he started talking about his work instantly, without me asking any questions and after barely sitting down. He appeared very keen to share his experiences and discuss his practice but this meant that we did not have any time building rapport before the interview started. However, I do not think that this was detrimental as he appeared relaxed, comfortable and at ease.

I thought DT one was very open in his talking. He was insightful and I enjoyed listening to him, his concerns and his ideas. He very much took the lead in the interview and it therefore felt quite un-structured, although I did ask some of the questions from the schedule nearer the end and was prompting throughout for deeper elaboration. I did not ask all the questions from the interview schedule but this felt fine and I was happy that the interview was lead by him and the topics he thought were relevant to his experiences. I felt like I was getting a good insight into his life world by listening to his views and following up on his concerns, thoughts and feelings. I thought my active listening skills had increased from the pilot interview, however I still found it difficult to pick out additional lines of enquiry (related to what he had said and not my own agenda) and remember to come back to these. I think this is partly because he was saying a lot, quickly, and partly because this is not an easy thing to do and requires practice. I could not help worry that important things were missed, as DT one kept saying things like "I'll come back to that" and getting side tracked. I felt like it was hard to keep up with him at times, but making notes was invaluably helpful.

I felt that I used less verbal utterance (for example, 'right' and 'makes sense'), however I had to make a conscious effort to do this and at times I still noticed that I had said 'right' almost unconsciously. This brought it to the forefront of my mind and I did try to stay aware of this during the interview.

The last question asked (is there anything that we have not talked about that is an important part of your experience?) appeared to be very helpful in eliciting his views. Even though I thought we had covered a lot in-depth, he still had more to say here. I think that phrasing tapped into exactly what I wanted it to (*important* part of *your experience*).

I think we built up a good relationship during the interview which was based on a mutual interest and enthusiasm. At the end DT one said "it's always good to have people from the LA visit". Again, I think this reflects his open character and suggests that he enjoyed taking part in the interview. I left feeling happy with my skills as an interviewer, however I was also conscious that not all DTs may be as open and forthcoming.

Designated Teacher Two

I found DT two very friendly and caring. We spent time building rapport by talking about the school, her roles and the number of LAC. This time appeared important to her as I noticed some apparent nervousness. She informed me that she had asked the head teacher's permission to participate and this appeared to suggest that she had thought through her possible participation and the implications. She appeared to have a lot of experiences to discuss but she appeared quite wary of being audio recorded. This was most apparent at the end of the interview when she said "now that's off I can say...".

This interview appeared more structured than the previous one and DT two appeared to focus more on answering my questions rather than taking the discussion in the direction she wanted. This was apparent at the start when she asked if she could just tell me about something rather than answer the particular question that I had asked. Through the probes I thought I was able to encourage her to elaborate as she wished and as the interview progressed she seemed to do this more. The last question again encouraged her to talk about topics that we had not covered but were important to her experiences.

I found listening intently to DT two easier than DT one. Her talk was easier to follow and less 'all over the place'. This meant that it was easier to note and return to topics that had not been elaborated on. The interview was quite light hearted and humorous towards the start and we both laughed quite a lot. However, this appeared to change at a point where she spoke about the life experiences of LAC. She appeared to find it hard to remain positive and I found this part of the interview quite emotionally challenging. This was especially apparent when she talked about LAC having their belongings moved in bin-bags. I think this is because I have a personal connection to this as the charity that my partner represents has tried to raise awareness of and reduce this practice. I was conscious that I did not want to let my emotions impact on her talk and so I tried to remain positive and not show the sadness. Although this sadness was also apparent for her, she was soon able to re-adopt her positive stance as we moved on to talking about different topics.

We carried on talking for a while after the audio recorder had been turned off as she had lots to say and wanted to carry on talking. At times I wished the audio recorder had still been turned on but we made the collaborative decision to turn it off. This may suggest that DT two was reserved in some of her talk and possibly did not want to express some of her true thoughts and feelings on tape.

Designated Teacher Three

I already knew this DT from my previous work as an assistant EP and we therefore already had a positive working relationship. We spent time building rapport by discussing how the school had evolved and changed since I was last there. I was conscious that our previous existing relationship may impact on the interview but DT three appeared to accept me in my new role and I think it helped her to feel more relaxed.

Before the interview started I noticed some concerns through the DT saying "I hope I can give you what you want". This made me conscious about the apparent power imbalance and I therefore spent extra time talking about how I was exploring DTs individual experiences, so there were no right or wrong answers and the main focus

was to discuss things that were important to her. This appeared to alleviate the focus on 'giving me what I wanted'.

I was struck by the apparent fight that the DT felt she was having with professionals involved in the care system. This was a lot more apparent than in the first two interviews and appeared almost all encompassing. DT three became very emotional when talking about a LAC leaving the school and the positive change she has seen in him since becoming 'looked after'. She became so emotional she actually cried. This strangely made me feel happy as it was nice to see how passionate and involved she was.

DT three naturally elaborated on her thoughts and feelings which meant that I did not ask as many prompts or probes. Throughout the interview I also became more sensitive to when she was pausing to think and when she was pausing because she was not going to add anything else independently. This was apparent through her non-verbal language such as making eye-contact. I felt that some of the interview was a bit repetitive and we spent time covering the same issues at different points. However, I did not think that was a bad thing as these were the topics that were most important to her experiences and therefore it was important to cover these in-depth.

I am still struggling not to say 'right' and 'okay' as much. Although I think it is important to not do this as it can impact on the flow of the conversation, I felt awkward not saying anything to acknowledge her concerns. Did she need this reassurance or are these just my concerns? I felt like I had to do something to show continual interest and so I tried nodding more in this interview. I felt she needed this, but it may have been me who needed to do this for my own ease.

Towards the end of the interview (roughly 40 minutes in) the EP for the school entered the room. This meant that we had to take a break from the interview because the DT wanted to talk to her. Although I think not doing this could have affected our rapport, the DT appeared to find it difficult to remember what she had already said and what additional areas she had not already mentioned when we came back to the interview. The flow of the conversation was therefore interrupted.

Designated Teacher Four

We spent time building rapport by talking about the school. This appeared to help her relax, however DT four had some slight apprehension with regard to confidentiality. When I discussed confidentiality she informed me that this was a question that she was going to ask, however she seemed happy with my explanation.

Throughout the interview her passion was readily apparent. I enjoyed listening to this and I therefore enjoyed the interview. I also think DT four benefitted from the interview and she readily admitted that she found it a useful process which had supported her to think about things she had not consciously considered before. This made me feel happy and I thought about the fact that although there were no immediate gains to taking part, this could have been one of them and was.

DT four did not make a lot of eye contact as she talked and I noticed this almost instantly. This lack of eye contact felt awkward for me in places, I don't know why and this is not something that I have noticed makes me feel awkward before. Maybe this is because it was just us two in a small room for a prolonged period. I was slightly suspicious as to why she was not making eye contact at first and I was questioning her genuineness. I was also questioning whether she was feeling awkward or nervous herself. This was not apparent in any of her other body language which I observed and so I decided that was just her natural approach. Although this meant that I had time to look at my interview schedule without her noticing, I am aware that I should not need to do this. I know all the questions, prompts and probes, and I therefore need to have more confidence in this.

In this interview we spent a lot more time discussing some of the things that she does to support LAC. It was interesting listening to how many different topic areas could come out of asking this one question. DT four tended to cover a number of areas at a shallow level and therefore asking additional probes was important to take the conversation deeper. I was concerned here that I was asking her to elaborate on areas which I thought were important (for example, the role of the foster carer). However, I only did this for topics she mentioned and did not ask her to discuss things she had not mentioned according to my own agenda. To ensure this, additional probes were

phrased using her own language. The conversations this one question facilitated therefore reminded me of how you may approach an unstructured interview where one broad question is asked and emerging topics are then explored further.

<u>Designated Teacher Five</u>

We spent time building rapport by discussing the school transition to academy status. DT five appeared to be open and relaxed throughout. This interview felt very different to the previous ones as the conversation did not appear to flow as easily. This felt quite disheartening and frustrating because I felt I had come quite a way in developing my skills as an interviewer. However, I continued to remind myself that not all participants will be as forthcoming and that is why I created an interview schedule with questions, prompts and probes to facilitate the discussions. I could not help thinking that LAC were not high up on her priorities and this was frustrating at first. However, after hearing about the needs of families in the area and the needs of the LAC in the school, it became more apparent why this might be the case and I therefore felt I was more understanding. This also made me think about how different the role can be for different DTs.

I felt this interview was more structured than the previous ones. This is because even through asking prompts and probes, the DT did not appear to discuss thoughts and feelings in depth. For this reason, I did not make a lot of notes regarding topics or interesting lines of enquiry in which to return. I also felt awkward probing for more depth when she quite apparently did not want to talk in more depth, possibly because her experiences of supporting LAC are not of considerable significance. I thought this because when I asked her how something made her feel she replied that she was not bothered and this did not appear to be a defence mechanism. This made me feel apprehensive about asking for her feelings around other topics as I did not want to affect the rapport.

Towards the start of the interview I felt slightly worried about the timing. As the conversation was not flowing as naturally, I was worried about the amount of data I would have to analyse. However, as I became aware of this I tried to put this to the back of my mind and refrained from looking at the timer. I reminded myself that I

wanted to gain an understanding of the experiences of a range of DTs and because of this, it was only natural that some DTs would have more to say than others.

<u>Designated Teacher Six</u>

We spent time building rapport by discussing, for example, how the role of co-head teacher developed. This felt especially important here and this conversation was perhaps longer than in the other interviews. This was because DT six appeared slightly apprehensive beforehand and expressed worries about what she should be doing, whether she was fulfilling her duties and how her practice compared to other DTs.

Once DT six started talking about her experiences she appeared to relax more and was quite talkative. I found myself doing less non-verbal acknowledgements as she appeared happy to talk without looking for my responses. She often guided the conversation to topics of personal importance to her. Although at the start I did feel like I was asking a lot of probes to elicit more in-depth thoughts and feelings, she appeared to pick up on this and began independently elaborating more and more as the conversation progressed.

Due to the size of the school, the interview was held in a small room which stored arts and crafts materials. For this reason a number of pupils and teachers entered the room throughout the interview. Although this obviously impacted on the flow of the conversation, DT six always appeared to remember her concerns and was able to come back to the points she was discussing. Although the room was not ideal, DT six had chosen this space and she seemed comfortable with it.

I think DT six benefitted from having the opportunity to discuss her role as a DT and she obviously wanted to do this to help her explore it. I think in general a number of the DTs have developed their thinking regarding their role and I feel happy that I have been able to facilitate this. However, I am also conscious that DT six was carrying a number of worries which she has not been able to process. After the interview had finished she was keen to discuss the experiences of the other DTs that

I have interviewed. I think this again emphasised that she was worrying that she was not doing the role 'properly'.

Appendix 8: Exploratory Comments and Emergent Themes
Sample pages for DT One

Exploratory Comments Code: Black= Descriptive Comments, Blue= Linguistic Comments and Red= Conceptual Comments

Emergent Themes	Line	Transcript	Exploratory Comments
	110	looked after may be resident in this area, because they're in	
	111	the catchment area, but at the same time their, their, their,	
	112	controlling or financial authority could be from out of town.	
Out of Area complications	113	*Right*	Knows numbers, this is clearly important/impacts
	114	Although, seven for example, there are two who are from	
	115	out of town.	
	116	*Right*	
Importance of home stability	117	But they are living here with foster families, or carers, long	Long term- this is important?
	118	term carers.	
	119	*Right*	
	120	So what we were, what the school was subjected to was,	Lots of people investigating/questioning progress
Under close examination	121	was enquiries from... external authorities and our own	
	122	authority and basically saying 'look, every three months or	Subjected- helplessness, forced upon them, unwelcome/unpleasant?
	123	six months, somebody external to the school needs to come	
	124	in and needs to go through the progress that the child is	
	125	making in school, acting as parent if you will, like, like a	Demands made from external parties. Told what to do and how. Lack of autonomy. Ordered? Or maybe needed telling what to do.
	126	parent would'. Yeh no problem. 'What you need to do er,	
	127	school, is that you need to first of all setup what's called a	
	128	PEP, personal education plan, er, and then, that, that plan	

Adapting systems	129	has to be added to every three or six months as you go	Sense that it has changed. It had to? Need to adapt systems?
	130	through the, the school cycle.' When it first came it was a	
	131	fairly lengthy form.	
	132	*Right*	Wasting time with paperwork- not fit for purpose? Not having an impact? Need to adapt so don't waste time/effort?
	133	And I did the first two and then it, I thought this is a waste	
	134	of my time.	

Emergent Themes	Line	Transcript	Exploratory Comments
Under scrutiny	250	er, if there's going to be, if, if, if the student hasn't made	Difficulty to answer- who answering to?
	251	sufficient progress and there's going to be some difficulty to	Feeling accountable and under scrutiny, so
	252	answer, occasionally the PMs will, will, will ask me to drop	then need to be active- to cover back, not for
	253	into the meeting and we'll go through the reasons as to why	child's benefit?
	254	progress has not been made.	
	255	*Right*	Divorced- removed? Distanced?
Importance of delegating	256	So I'm, I'm, I'm not that divorced but before it was all	Bottle neck- performance of entire system
	257	hands on through me, and it was a bottled neck, now it's	limited by his capacity. Congestion,
	258	more diverse within the school.	obstruction. Can't just rely on him, too much
	259	*Right, okay, and you mentioned the usefulness?*	for one person, must share responsibilities.
	260	Usefulness of the form? Right, it's more or less stayed in its	
	261	same format cause when I get it through I can still recognise	
Tracking is priority	262	sections that, that are, that are still there. I mean obviously	Obviously- must monitor/track
	263	there's got to be a database of er, er, levels of achievement,	Does this then influence practice? No mention
	264	attendance, and, and, and, er, punctuality, number of	of it. Due to accountability?
	265	referrals, if they've, if they've had a referral from a, from	
	266	the sanction system er... and looking through the other	

Accountability	267	sections that are on there... what I always have to remember	
	268	is that it's not just the school audience, it's a wider	Wider audience- checking up on his practice.
	269	audience, the carer, the social worker, any independent	Wider accountability. Doing it for others or
	270	person who wants to come in and review it to see if, if it's	himself? Battle a) it useful b) hard, time
	271	been made, er, so my usefulness is tinged with my	consuming, repetitive, tedious.
	272	experience of completing it as a task. Does it, is it then, is it	
	273	then used in the meeting? Yes, the one's I've been to more	
Developing practice	274	recently it is used, because there's a general review, with the	Used recently- actions develop/change
	275	student there as well, there's a general review, and the older	
Barriers to LAC voice	276	they are the more confident, but there's a general review of	LAC in meetings, older more confident. Age
	277	what they feel has gone on in school and there is the	can be a barrier to LAC having voice?

Emergent Themes	Line	Transcript	Exploratory Comments
LAC identity development	334	the evening that dads left, very often, you know, people will	LAC struggling with their identity
	335	think, everybody's looking at me because my dad's left	
	336	home. And 99% of the population have no idea what the	
	337	background is and they have no idea what's happened,	Whose information is it to share? DT must not
	338	unless you tell them of course. But the person on the other	share if LAC don't share?
Comparison to other vulnerable groups	339	end, thinks... they all know. And I think that the looked after	LAC feel different
	340	children and the young carers and the free school meals and	Comparison to other vulnerable groups
	341	the vulnerable groups very often, when I talk to them, will,	
Discretion needed	342	will, will kind of be reticent about making it known what	Reticent- need to work with discretion,
	343	their background situation is.	respecting their wishes?
	344	*Right*	
Flexible in approach	345	Er, some are confident, some are great with it. I mean, you	LAC are different with different views about

	346	know, the, the majority have got good friends. The girl	sharing their status. Easier for DT if open.
	347	upstairs for example, fantastic, all her friends know what the	Great= open and not hiding
Importance of home stability	348	situation is er, it, you know the carer er, is, er, has been there	Importance of stability
	349	for a long time and it's, and it's not an issue, it's not a	
LAC identity development	350	problem. But others, that you know, I can think of one	Impact on identity development
	351	young lad in year, er, eight, has had difficulty accepting the	
	352	fact that he is living under a different situation.	
	353	*Right, and what does that mean for, for your work... or role?*	
Difficulties with discretion	354	Er, like, like awareness really, just, just to know that, with a	Need to be aware of individual wishes. Hard
	355	thousand, I mean I know it's not today because there's few	to know all LACs' wishes cause so many
	356	and less of them, but with the thousands of children that	other pupils/issues to think about.
	357	pass though doors and pass through classrooms every day...	
Variability in role	358	To be fair I'm more familiar with them now cause there's a	Numbers impact. Variability in role depending
	359	smaller number, but I think if I worked in a city school and,	on setting? Role is different in different
	360	and, they, they were in their tens, which it could be, I would	circumstances.
	361	be less aware and it could be, not just me, as, as the	

Emergent Themes	Line	Transcript	Exploratory Comments
	558	related learning and careers education and so. If we had	
	559	more looked after children, and the role was beyond, cause	Importance of PMs having the time for him to
Importance of	560	the PMs do it alongside everything else. If there was more,	delegate activities
delegating	561	almost certainly we would probably have a post, full time,	Would this be quick/easy to do? Unprepared
Unprepared	562	or maybe three days a week, whereby the single individual	for quick increase.
	563	person would just be dealing with the welfare of the looked	Concerns about number of LAC and ability to
Impact of numbers	564	after children. And I suspect in the city they maybe do that.	support. DT role and support needs depend on
	565	At the moment we've got seven and it's doable. So, er, in	numbers of LAC.
	566	terms of my, in terms of my, er... thoughts, I think we're	Doable- only just?
Fulfilling legal	567	probably, I think we're probably, well, well I know we fulfil	Only fulfilling statutory duties? Not above
requirements	568	what we're supposed to do. Whether or not it's a quality	this? Only do what is scrutinised- PEP? Who
	569	experience or not I'd need somebody to come in and kind of	is the client?
Need support to reflect	570	spend a day with the children and, and do an evaluation and	
	571	think 'do you get a good deal?' and then for that same	Need external support to reflect and identify
	572	evaluer to contact the authorities and say 'what's your	points for development. Cannot do this in
	573	relationship like with the school? Is it effective? Do you feel	isolation? Unable to review his practice on
	574	that they do what they're supposed to do?'. Er, and then	own? Doesn't have enough information.
	575	perhaps, you know, a report back saying well 'you do this,	Doesn't know what other DTs are doing?
Lack of insight into	576	this and this really well, but in fact er, you know, compared	
other DTs' practice	577	to national norms you're not as active here or this could be a	
	578	suggestion here'.	
	579	*Right*	
	580	So in answer to your question, I, I, I suppose not, not in the	'A little' in the dark. Can't see properly. Can
	581	dark as such. My perception is that it's effective... because	look, but don't necessarily see. External

	582	nobodies coming down the line saying you're not.	support brings things into vision
	583	*Mm Hmm, yeh, that makes sense* [both laugh]	
Need support to reflect	584	But it could be terrible, it could not be effective. I mean, I	Practice could be terrible- doesn't ask/reflect
	585	mean I do think sometimes that, er, the progress of the	independently. Relies on external scrutiny?

Emergent Themes	Line	Transcript	Exploratory Comments
Pride in success	782	know, she'll probably go on to sixth form and, and	Pride in success. Positive impact.
	783	university. Er, and that's good to see and I see her every	
Being LAC as problematic	784	now and again. I mean apart from being looked after, your	Being LAC is a problem, but other problems on top of that.
	785	father has died as well, you know, I see her round school	
	786	and so and 'how's things going? Do you need anything?'	See round school- no organised 1:1 contact
	787	'No' and you know, she seems, she seems rounded you	
	788	know people do, well again you see there's another aspect to	
	789	this case. She was very aware before father died that she	
LAC not wanting to be different	790	didn't want to be seen different because she was in care... so	LAC not wanting to be seen as different. They make attempts to hide it. He needs to be aware of this and hide it too?
	791	she would refer to mum and dad before but wouldn't go for	
	792	example to sleepovers but would go to movies.	
	793	*Right*	Being outed as LAC makes it easier- has he asked the child about this? Does he mean it's easier for him?
	794	Because it didn't you know, sleepover involves explaining	
Difficulties with discretion	795	the scenario back at home. Er, I think because, I think one of	
	796	the factors of dad dying, obviously that became kind of	Twisted way- It's strange and wrong that it should be easier. But it is for him as he does not need to act with discretion. Was it easier for her or is this why it's twisted?
	797	fairly public knowledge, it, it, that's now been made easier	
Being LAC as problematic	798	for her in a, in a twisted way that the rest of her friends do	
	799	know that she's in care er, and, and have seen the tragedy of	

	800	that as well as losing her foster father.	Tragedy- being LAC brings about great suffering, comparable to death of loved one.
	801	*Mm Hmm*	
	802	So those are three things that have worked well.	
	803	*Right, er, what do you think that other people think about the*	
	804	*work that you do?*	
Undercover role	805	Largely they're not, apart from the PMs, the teaching staff	Only people who he delegates to are aware.
	806	are largely not aware of it. They only time I, they, they get to	Lack of working with other staff to increase awareness and knowledge.
	807	know about looked after children is a) on the forms, when	
Involvement if	808	they get the forms at the start of the year or b) if something	No preventative work.
difficulties	809	goes wrong and then I have to go down and say 'look, well	Increased involvement if difficulties.

Appendix 9: Subordinate Themes and Related Emergent Themes
For DT One

Subordinate Themes	Emergent Themes	Sample of Quotes
The importance of support for LAC (later termed 'recognising vulnerability')	LAC have SEN Being LAC as problematic LAC have barriers to overcome	They also had, usually, not always, but some form of special need, on a varying scale (158-160) He joined us er and brought with him a range of issues (604-605) The rest of her friends do know that she's in care er and, and have seen the tragedy of that as well as losing her foster father (lines 798-800)
Plate spinning (later termed 'spinning plates')	Balancing act Impact of balancing act Other roles and responsibilities Importance of delegating Involvement if difficulties Comparing to other vulnerable groups	Does it need my expertise or can it go elsewhere? (line 27) There are literally too many plates and so whereas when you were first training you would want to do a job, see it to its end point, get a conclusion and shelve it. That can't be done, you have to leave them midflight and go off and do something else (lines 920-924) Yes I can designate time to it of course I can, what will happen I know for absolute certainty is that something will come along and impinge on that time (lines 945-947)

Jumping through hoops	Under close examination Accountability Under scrutiny Service provider Fulfilling legal requirements Tracking is priority Adapting systems	In terms of looked after children obviously they get the same deal as everybody else in the school but their programme of learning is closely monitored by the personal education plan (102-105) Our, our relationship I think has got better er but before it was certainly... er...they were the customer and we were the service provider (457-459) It shouldn't be making sure the forms are filled out to arrive at authority on Monday morning cause that's a very expensive waste of me (1075-1077)
Voice and advocacy (later termed 'levels of participation')	External advocacy needed Barriers to LAC voice Pupil voice Lack of LAC voice	There's a general review, with the student there as well, there's a general review, and the older they are the more confident (274-276) Whether or not the student feels it's useful or not I don't know (283-284) But that would be a training course that would be better for them to do rather than me (1175-1176)
Owning the label (later termed 'battling with the label')	Flexible in approach Not singled out Owning the label The need for discretion	I don't do it overtly, I don't say 'oh, you're the looked after kid, just come with me'. You know, we do it, we do, we do it quietly and so forth (301-304)

	Difficulties with discretion LAC have different wishes LAC identity development LAC not wanting to be different Impact of disclosure	His multiple care situation arose because of his er... inability and unwillingness to fit in to being in care (614-615) The girl upstairs for example, fantastic, all her friends know what the situation is (346-348)
Developing relationships (later termed 'laying the foundations')	Developing relationships over time Developing relationships through contact Worries about lack of relationships Mutual understanding and respect	Our, our relationship I think has got better (457) And then we came to an understanding at, we helped their understanding of how a secondary school runs. They helped our understanding of what scrutiny the child should be under (485-488) So that's much more fluid, so we have good relationships there. We haven't always had those er, an, and I'm quite... thoughtful as to how that's going to work out in the forthcoming years as the budget cuts take effect (887-890)
The importance of home stability (later termed 'lightening the load')	Importance of home stability Worries about home instability Impact of instability The role of the foster carer Foster carers reduce the burden	You know the carer er is er has been there for a long time and it's, and it's not an issue (348-349) The two year 11 lads that have left, their progress definitely was hindered by the scenario that they were in. They were, the two that were left were er multiple carers. They

		had gone from home and scenario to scenario (596-601) We at that point thought that that particular placement might then fail. It didn't, if anything it's got stronger (789-781)
Travelling the distance	Understanding the need Out of Area complications Distant relationships Lack of contact	Further complication, we don't always deal with the same authority (108-109) Er, sometimes that can be a bit challenging. One of the two of the students are from out of town, we don't meet their PEP people, it's done virtually (446-448) Well they sent one child first er, er, I fully understand the reasons why the child had to move out the area (461-463)
Detached from DT contact (later termed 'detached DT community')	Lack of contact with other DTs Lack of insight into other DTs practice LAC in other schools Lack of role clarity	In terms of the designated role, I don't know how other institutions do it... I don't (542-544) School are, and staff are... probably working independently (1322) There isn't... there isn't as strong a degree of exchange of practice and there isn't as strong a degree of co-operation that there perhaps was before when the authority was in its heyday (1317-1320)

Undercover role (later termed 'working undercover')	Lack of awareness Undercover role Staff don't need to know Don't need empathy/sympathy	Because of confidentiality sometimes I'm the only one that can fill it out (223-224) Largely they're not, apart from the PMs, the teaching staff are largely not aware of it (805-806) The vast majority of teaching staff just know that my names next to it. The, the, really, and, and they've no need to really to be fair to them (816-820)
Developing role (later termed 'developing competence')	Evolving role Developing practice Initial apprehension Developing competence over time Importance of time	It's been more, it's been more formal in the last eight or so years (387-388) So, but that's developed over, you know, that, those systems have developed over a period of time (440-441) I mean I would have said in the early days I probably wasn't as effective in monitoring the progress of the children (587-589)
Support needs (later termed 'relevant and available support')	Importance of external support Need support to reflect Available support Support to meet needs	I suppose not, not in the dark as such. My perception is that it's effective... because nobodies coming down the line saying you're not (580-582) Local authority training has helped because it's made me aware of what I'm supposed to be doing and it's, and, and the refresher

		training is good as well cause it reminds me (905-908) I think the authority support as well er, when I've rung up occasionally er, to say 'what' you know 'what should be the scenario?' er, then that's been quite useful (925-927)
Variability across schools (later termed 'the lack of consistency')	Impact of numbers Variability in role Unprepared	If we get more looked after children it could be, and again schools are moving all the time, it could be that we employ someone who's not a teacher (1027-1030) I can see that happening in schools, especially in schools where the, the numbers of those children are increasing (1039-1041) In this particular school that's not such a desperate need but if we had more looked after kids (1132-1133)

Appendix 10: Superordinate Themes and Related Subordinate Themes Across Participants

Superordinate Theme 1: Personal Commitment and the Need for Resilience		
Subordinate Themes	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of Quotes**
Recognising vulnerability	LAC have SEN LAC as individuals Being LAC as problematic Impact of previous experiences LAC have barriers to overcome LAC as resilient LAC as different Impact of being LAC LAC as aliens LAC as vulnerable	They've all got stories, bad stories to that (DT two, 938-939) They can be challenging, a lot of them are challenging I think (DT three, lines 660-661) He's, he's a very mixed up young man (DT four, lines 148-149) There's a whole other world that is er more common than you'd like to think (DT six, lines 316-317)
Spinning plates	Balancing act Impact of balancing act Other roles and responsibilities Need to be available, physically and emotionally Competing priorities Comparing to other vulnerable groups Coping mechanisms Highly demanding Importance of delegating Involvement if difficulties	And that's why it's good for me to not be teaching because they know they can pop in most of the time and I'll be around or they'll be able to find me somewhere (DT two, 105-107) It's a, it's a lot to deal with and you've got to be dealing with it everyday, possibly (DT four, lines 698-700)

| | | I think it's just another category of child protection, you know you have your CAF children, your child protection plan children, your sort of we'll just keep an eye on you children and then you're looked after children (DT five, 615-619)

Sometimes I might, I look in my diary and think oh my god there's a PEP tomorrow and I haven't done anything (DT six, lines 180-181) |
|---|---|---|
| **Emotional investment** | Attachment
Ownership
Personal rewards
Pride in success
Looking after
Detaching emotionally
Sense of loss
Empathy
Sympathy
Emotional investment
Emotional resilience
Keeping in mind
Pain as driving force
Emotionally demanding
Emotional rollercoaster | There's lots of children that I've really fond memories of and I like to keep in touch with and know how they're doing (DT two, lines 992-994)

I saw him through transition and we really worried about him going up to secondary and he's, he's done well (DT three, lines 397-399)

I know that we're all going to be really worried about him for the future and, and emotional I guess when he leaves too (DT four, lines 446-448)

It's just magical and you can see the transformation (DT 303-304) |

Jumping through hoops	Systems not fit for purpose	On the Ofsted level [laughs] I do, I monitor
	Frustration at systems	the children (DT two, lines 135-136)
	Adapting systems	
	Under close examination	That's how it has to be [laughs] (DT five, line
	Under scrutiny	656)
	Under close examination	
	Ofsted level	From the child's point of view they don't lose
	Accountability	out because there isn't a hard copy of a PEP in
	Service provider	school, so I suppose that's what I mean as to
	Fulfilling legal requirements	how useful the systems are (DT six, lines 357-
	Following guidelines	359)
	Following orders	
	Tracking is priority	
	Importance of monitoring	
	Mandatory role	
	Imparted requirements	
	Justifying actions	

Superordinate Theme 2: Recognising the Child at the Centre		
Subordinate Themes	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of Quotes**
Levels of participation	Facilitating voice	If something comes up at the PEP say and
	Importance of voice	they'll say 'oh John wants music tuition' say
	Pupil voice	then I can say, hand on heart, that we can get
	Lack of LAC voice	that sorted (DT two, lines 142-145)
	Voice and influence	
	LAC participation/collaboration	The children have their input as well and I
	Giving LAC control	think that's, that's really nice (DT three, lines

	External advocacy needed Champion Barriers to LAC voice Age as barrier	292-293) You're their champion, who better to be their champion than the head (DT four, lines 712-714) The children are meant to sit down at some point and do their view point. I think I tried it once with a child but they were just too young, in my view (DT six, lines 202-204)
Battling with the label	LAC not wanting to be different Flexible in approach Balancing act Not singled out Impact of disclosure Fighting for normality The need for discretion Secrecy Difficulties with discretion Positives of not needing discretion LAC have different wishes Owning the label Battling with the label LAC identity development LAC questioning identity Facilitating identity development	I think they do need a champion but they don't necessarily need to be shouting from the roof tops all the time (DT two, lines 212-214) The other children in school would never know that these children were looked after (DT five, lines 504-505) Why are we singling them out, that's the last thing they need er cause the children themselves already know they are different and other children in the class know they're different (DT six, lines 407-410)

Superordinate Theme 3: The Importance of a Holistic Approach		
Subordinate Themes	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of Quotes**
Laying the foundations	Developing key relationships Relationships as foundations Developing relationships over time Developing relationships through contact Interpersonal skills The importance of relationships Facilitative relationships Going the extra mile Reducing power imbalance Worries about lack of relationships Impact of not having trusting relationships Mutual understanding and respect	The carers looked after all seven sibling that went through the school so it does lend itself quite nicely (DT two, lines 37-39) It's been great with foster carers, I've got to know them really well, first name terms er... I think that really helps (DT three, lines 524-526) You have to be at those meetings in order to establish those kinds of relationships (DT four, lines 690-691) The social workers who you know because of other child protection issues in school so they're familiar people (DT five, lines 113-114) Otherwise it's just through the official... paper trail that, that the contact is and you want to feel that they can come and er talk to you really (DT six, 128-130)
Lightening the load	Importance of home stability The importance of stability Worries about home instability Impact of instability	She came to this school for all the time, she never moved er so she was at our primary school and then our secondary school, so everything was very stable in her life which

	The role of the foster carer Foster carers reduce the burden Supporting home life Importance of foster carer ethos	was really good (DT two, lines 316-319) I do feel it's part of the looked after role, you're there to support the parents as well (DT three, lines 164-166) He's going to be thinking 'well what happens after this school' cause we've been his constant since he came (DT four, 210-212) The carers role in sort of, how proactive they are in dealing with things makes a big difference (DT five, lines 292-293) If my role is to er make sure those children are as happy as they can be then it's the foster carers who help with that (DT six, 626-628)
Constructing the jigsaw	The importance of information sharing Need holistic information Importance of background information Impact of not having information Working in the dark Jigsaw pieces Being in the loop Missing school voice Falling through the net Owning the information	There can be a small piece of conversation and that'll have a knock on effect (DT two, lines 420-421) I feel very frustrated cause you don't know, get to know what's going on a lot of the time (DT thee, lines 174-175) For a new head to take on without knowing the children, without knowing the backgrounds, that would be impossible (DT four, lines 732-734)

| | | If that was an ask of anyone it's like yeh, keep us in the loop (DT five, line 561)

You pick up lots of background information and, and, so you do get a wider view than just school (DT six, lines 85-86) |
|---|---|---|
| **Travelling the distance** | Understanding the need
Out of Area complications
Impact of physical distance
Distant relationships
Lack of contact
Impact of lack of contact
Different system | It's been really difficult [laughs] to get the contact from the social workers (DT two, lines 55-56)

If I had an issue with a looked after child who was say looked after by _city_, you never had a clear line of communication, you, you wouldn't, didn't necessarily know people (DT five, lines 135-138)

I said 'woo, woo, woo, just wait er, I, I've never heard of these', 'oh well they're used over in _city'_, I said 'well they're not used here, I've never heard of them, you can't, somebody can't just come swanning in and er' etc (DT six, lines 421-425) |

Superordinate Theme 4: Working on the Margins		
Subordinate Themes	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of Quotes**
Detached DT community	Lack of contact with other DTs Lack of insight into other DTs practice No sharing of practice LAC in other schools Lack of role clarity DT assumptions Network to support practice	Paperwork isn't, isn't the role at all and it's, in our school anyway (DT two, lines 86-87) I think it does happen that, even at primary level, you know the school just send a reports as to how the child is doing (DT four, lines 286-288) I think in schools, because I would imagine quite a lot of the time it's the head (DT five, lines 625-626) I don't know if it's different at secondary school (DT six, line 165)
Working undercover	Lack of awareness Lack of acknowledgment Isolation Undercover role Invisibility Insider v's outsiders Using a disguise Staff don't need to know Lack of empathy from others Don't need empathy/sympathy	I didn't realise and I don't think people do (DT two, lines 200) I think in schools, staff just see it as part of the child protection role (DT five, lines 614-615) I think generally people don't, cause I certainly didn't before, before I got involved (DT six, lines 478-479)

The forgotten role	Beyond remit Impact of working beyond remit On the perimeters Blurred role boundaries Lack of control Powerless Carrying on regardless Fighting the opposition Struggling for acknowledgment Defeated Demoralised	No matter how many times we said it, how many things I put in front of them saying this happened, that happened, you didn't turn up, it, it didn't change anything (DT three, lines 471-473) I had to put the leg work in or we as a school had to put the leg work in, whereas it shouldn't really have been us but anyway (DT four, lines 605-608) We'd been pushing, the school had been pushing to say you know 'we really think this needs further intervention' (DT five, lines 350-352) Some of that I suppose I should chase but you forget (DT six, lines 341-342)

Superordinate Theme 5: Variability in Role and Support Needs		
Subordinate Themes	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of Quotes**
Developing competence	Evolving role Developing practice Developing competence over time Importance of time Learning on the job New territory Out of comfort zone Progression Transition into role Initial apprehension Adapting Gaining more knowledge	The more I do the job the more I've been picking up on it (DT two, 916-917) It's something you can pick up quite quickly but I think you learn as you go along as well (DT three, lines 593-595) Getting up to speed with all, all that it entails (DT four, 696-697) It's something I've never done before (DT five, line 396) Slowly you realised how it, how it did, or is meant to work (DT six, lines 50-51)
Relevant and available support	Importance of external support Need support to reflect Available support Support to meet needs Support depends on needs Tailored support Not all support is supportive Support to mirror competence Lack of reflecting Training for reinvigoration	At the beginning they were really, really useful (DT two, line 671) I mean that makes it much easier when you know, when you've got the person you know to go to and I have been to them (DT three, 222-224) I think it's been good for me to have this, this discussion really (DT four, lines 743-744)

		I felt it was quite interesting, some interesting stuff, but there wasn't anything new (DT five, lines 662-663) I went again on, there was like an update training and having done it all it was much more meaningful (DT six, lines 554-555)
The lack of consistency	Role as fluid Impact of numbers Variability in role Positioning other DTs as different Depends on LACs' needs Lack of preparation Unprepared Reactive approach Proactive approach	At that time we only had nine looked after children in the school (DT two, lines 84-85) Well we only had one child, one child (DT three, line 18) I could imagine if that child is more challenging and more draining on resources, normally man power resources, you know and then er, linked in with that you've got layers on with extra agencies, you've got more paperwork attached to it, you've got reports to write up so yeh I could see that it could become much bigger (DT five, 750-755) At the time in school I think we had one or two (DT six, 36-37)