

Young People Leaving Care: Plans, Challenges and Discourses

Catherine Elizabeth Lamond

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Abstract

This small-scale study explored plans for four young people leaving care and the perspectives of twelve key adults supporting them. Using Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis, the rationale for this research was concern about the difference in outcomes between care leavers and young people in general. Aims were to explore if contradictions in plans and ideas contributed to problems for the young people, and to examine explanations and justifications made by the adult participants. Data were collected by semi-structured interviews from an opportunistic sample. Findings indicated that the established problem of young people having to leave care too early persists in spite of initiatives to prevent this happening. Theories drawn from the psychology of child development influence the professionals' constructions of the young people, thereby limiting the responses which adults can offer. It is proposed that neoliberal discourses of individual responsibility and continuous self-improvement constrain systems which encourage young people to leave care before they are ready. Two concepts of *chop* (abrupt change, such as end of school phase) and *churn* (disruption, such as staff turnover) are used to examine how frequent disturbance in the life of a looked after child is exacerbated by points of rupture which are caused by the structures of children's services. This study adds to calls for increased stability for young people, and recommends earlier planning for the future of young people in care. Implications for educational practice are presented, including the need to ensure that leaving mainstream education for segregated provision is not an irreversible decision. It is suggested that educators should consider

critically the labelling of looked after children as having Special Educational Needs, as this can lead to practices which encourage compliance by young people, and pathologise resistance which could instead be re-framed as self-reliance.

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1. Introduction

The starting-point for this study was my involvement in a small-scale funded research project which challenged adults' misconceptions about Higher Education as a destination for looked after children. This project heightened my awareness of the wide gap between the life chances for those from a care background and the general population (Axford, 2008), and built on my belief that education has an important role to play in promoting positive opportunities (Cameron and Maginn, 2009). Every year the Department for Education (DfE) publishes statistics on outcomes for looked after children in England which cover attainment at ages seven, eleven and sixteen; absence; exclusions; and special educational needs. The gap in attainment is large at age seven but grows with age: 14 percent of looked after children attain the main goal of five A*-C GCSEs including English and Mathematics, the standard qualification at age sixteen, compared to 53 percent of their peers (DfE, 2016a).

Educational disadvantage can lead to immediate problems for young care leavers. The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ,2014) suggests that at age nineteen, care leavers are twice as likely as their peers to be not in education, employment or training (NEET), and only 6 percent will have gone on to Higher Education (HE) compared to 30 percent of 19 year-olds. Life chances after leaving care are disproportionately poor. The CSJ further estimates that 20 percent of young homeless people, 24 percent of adults in prison, and 70 percent of sex workers are from a care background.

The focus on this disadvantaged group arose from my ontological position and overall approach to research, which can be summarised as a concern for social justice and a belief in inclusive education. I was enthused by the goal of what Luttrell (2010, p.2) terms 'transformative research' which 'is part of a family of terms - advocacy, critical, oppositional, activist, transgressive, decolonizing, and emancipatory - used by researchers who wish to leverage social change through their scholarship'. I was keen to give young people in care a voice through participatory research because it could potentially have some influence on the development of services for looked after children. Completing this study shifted my position towards recognition of the complex and entrenched nature of problems in this system.

I also had to be wary of what Cousin (2010, p.9) calls 'positional piety'. Throughout this study I grappled with ethical problems, primarily the fact that its main aim was to benefit me as a researcher rather than the participants. On the other hand, adding to the body of knowledge about the challenges faced by care leavers is a worthwhile endeavour, so although I may not have been able to improve outcomes for the young people in the study, this research can perhaps serve some purpose in influencing change in the longer term, possibly through it informing my teaching. Another ethical dilemma arose in regard to being critical of adult participants, who comprised foster carers, residential care workers, social workers and other adults working in Looked after Children teams, especially when they had been kind enough to agree to give up their time to talk to me. This attitude can be viewed as positional piety.

I was unable to remove these ethical dilemmas, but instead sought to lessen them through reflexivity, because 'the preeminent skill for conducting qualitative research is reflexivity' (Luttrell, 2010, p.3). Qualitative research does not seek to uncover 'the truth', but rather to offer possible interpretations, which places the researcher in the position of making choices about the research rather than following an external, 'objective' plan.

Throughout the study I reminded myself that I was making decisions where another researcher may have made alternative choices, but I could justify decisions by striving to be as ethical as I could. I have acknowledged that this thesis is written from my point of view, but this does not mean that I have used the first person throughout: as is the academic convention, I have aimed for more of a writing style based on the absent author, but recognise here that I have chosen every word.

In this study I aimed to explore plans for care leavers and their justifications from key adults through interviews to investigate how and why decisions are made at the point of transition to adulthood. It began with an examination of the literature, focusing on England, because as Munro and Gilligan (2013) highlight, the situation differs markedly in different countries, even within the British Isles.

2. Literature review

2.1 Historical overview

An overview of the history of care in England for 'children deprived of a normal home life' (Brill, 1991, p.1) reflects changes in attitudes to issues of poverty, the position of childhood, and the importance of family. The first workhouses were introduced in 1723, enforcing a system where families were separated in a drive to remove children from 'bad influences' (Jackson, 2006). The original institution which focused specifically on children was the Foundling Hospital, established by Royal Charter in 1739 and receiving the first foundling children in 1741, after years of campaigning by Thomas Coram (Foundling Museum, 2012). The Hospital was created for the 'Maintenance and Education of Exposed and Deserted Young Children': when a child was left by their mother they were baptised and given a new name, leaving the tainted identity of their mother behind (Foundling Museum, 2012).

In the late 19th century, Christian philanthropists established charitable institutions working in the area of child welfare. Thomas Barnardo opened his first children's home in 1870 and, after the death of a child who had been turned away due to lack of space, adopted the slogan 'No Destitute Child Ever Refused Admission'. Barnardo started an emigration scheme in the 1880s and also began the first fostering scheme in 1887, called 'boarding out': 'by 1891 a third of children cared for by Barnardo's were fostered' (Thomas and Philpot, 2009, in Cosis Brown, 2014, p.2). Thomas Bowman Stephenson founded The Children's Home, then Action for Children, in 1869; Edward

Rudolf founded the first Church of England 'Central Home for Waifs and Strays' in 1882 (which became The Children's Society); and Benjamin Waugh founded the London Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (later the NSPCC) in 1884, which broadened the focus from children who were destitute to cover children who were abused. The Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act was passed in 1889, known as the 'Children's Charter', and was the first time that outside agencies could intervene between a parent and their child. In the first half of the 20th century children who could not be looked after by their families continued to be taken into residential care in workhouses, which were only finally abolished in 1930, or in charitable institutions (Jackson, 2006). Although the difficulties faced by these children's families were often due to poverty, not irremediable problems, there seemed to be no route to reunification. Throughout this period, family life was not paramount: rather, children in impoverished families were removed with the aim of ensuring they could grow up to support themselves.

The Curtis Report in 1946 marked a shift in welfare services for vulnerable children (Brill, 1991), introducing the idea that society had some moral responsibility for children. The report recommended that specialist children's departments in local authorities be established, and this was enacted in the Children Act of 1948 which placed the responsibility for deprived children clearly in these new departments. Cosis Brown (2014, p.6) suggests that the legislative framework for looked after children has been 'in a regular state of flux' since 1945, meaning changes have never become embedded and services' ability to develop good practice has been disrupted by churn.

Rowlands and Statham (2009) chart the trends in numbers of children in care since the Second World War, showing the links between changes in legislation and changes in the size of the care population. In the 1950s, 60s and 70s children were often taken into care due to family difficulties such as homelessness: it was not until the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act in 1977 that there was a direct focus on supporting families to tackle homelessness and thereby prevent family break-up (Rowlands and Statham, 2009, p.81). Following the Seebohm Report, the Social Services Act of 1970 meant that children's departments were absorbed into general social services departments in 1971.

To draw together themes across this long period relating to children being cared for outside of their family, it could be suggested that poverty was the main reason for the need for care, as well as more general misfortunes such as sickness or bereavement. For centuries it was accepted that society included 'the poor', who were objects of both charity and regulation, the latter aiming to ensure that they were not a long-term burden on society.

2.2 Children and Young Persons Act (1969) – 2010

The Children and Young Persons Act of 1969 brought together care and control, leading to an increase in the numbers of children in care, partly due to the view that 'delinquents' needed to be removed from their families, enforcing chop. 'This view of juvenile offenders was practised by courts perhaps rather simplistically by removing 'wayward' children from 'bad homes' (Rowlands and Statham, 2009, p.81). These interventions marked a shift in attitudes from

a focus on lifting children out of destitution or abuse towards a focus on their future lives. Concern was raised in the early 1970s by reports such as 'Children Who Wait' (Rowe and Lambert, 1973) about children who drifted in care without a long-term plan. These influenced the Children Act 1975 and the Adoption Act 1976, showing the importance of planning for the future of vulnerable children. From 1979 onwards the Youth Justice System took over responsibility for children committing criminal offences, which led to a decrease in the numbers of children in care until 1994. Overall, this period marked a shift in dominant discourses about vulnerable children from poverty towards abuse, criminality, neglect and the long-term impact of a deprived childhood.

Cocker and Allain (2013) give an overview of the recent history of children in public care, demonstrating how trends of thought have led to modes of practice adopted currently. They outline how the period from the mid-1960s to mid-1980s has been termed 'the missing years' (Stein, 2006) as statistics were not collected about child welfare. Cocker and Allain further chart the development of a widespread concern about institutional abuse of children, expressed for example by what is known as the Utting review (Utting, 1997).

The Children Act of 1989 (Great Britain Parliament, 1989) brought about significant change in services for children and introduced the term 'looked after children', which refers to any child in the care of a local authority or provided with accommodation for more than twenty-four hours. This legislation was introduced in the context of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, based on the idea that a child is not the

property of his or her parents, but has individual, separate rights (UNICEF, 1989). It 'clearly established the principle that social services' role in child protection and children's welfare was to be supported by health and education services' (Fitzgerald and Kay, 2008, p.33) which was a move towards multi-agency working. Key principles underpinning the Act were the primacy of child welfare and the importance of keeping families together. These have led to tension between the focus on supporting families to bring up their children and concerns for child protection. Rowlands and Statham (2009) suggest that the rise in the numbers of looked after children since 1994 has been due to the cumulative influence of child protection inquiries. Their analysis identifies that the number of children being taken into care decreased, but the length of time they were in care increased, leading to a rise in the overall care population. This may indicate that at that time there were higher thresholds than previously for taking children into care, which could have an influence on poor outcomes as children were at greater risk of disadvantage.

Under Tony Blair the New Labour Government from 1997 expressed a commitment to improving the lives of children by tackling poverty and social exclusion, with the common-sense view that complex problems require 'joined-up thinking' (Anning, 2006). This period saw a shift towards focusing on the causes of social ills, with attempts to tackle structural disadvantage rather than solely individuals' deficits. That Government recognised that children in care were a particularly disadvantaged group, influenced by reports such as 'Looked After Children' (Parliamentary Health Select Committee, 1998). Throughout New Labour's time in office there grew a

substantial body of evidence about the workings of the care system which had a significant impact on policy and practice.

The 'Quality Protects' initiative (DoH, 1998) tasked local authorities with gathering clear information about looked after children in order to provide more effective services. The Children (Leaving Care) Act of 2000 focused particularly on care leavers and defined two main aims. The first was to ensure that young people do not leave care until they are ready, and the second, to ensure that they receive more effective support once they have left (A National Voice, 2012). Different levels of support were set out for care leavers aged 16-17, 18-21, or over 21 but there was a requirement for local authorities to take responsibility for the young people they have been looking after in the transition to adulthood up until age twenty-four. The recognition that young people need support in the long-term has been upheld by the United Nations (Munro *et al.*, 2011).

However, the points made in 2000 were repeated in 'Care Matters: Time for Change' (DfES, 2007), with a call to ensure that care leavers were provided with the support they needed as 'Local Authorities are not fulfilling their duties' (CSJ, 2008, p.19). This document further extended the support to be provided to young people in and from care and its provisions were enacted in the Children and Young Person Act of 2008. In relation to care leavers the Act set two targets. Firstly, it aimed to prevent

local authorities from discharging young people prematurely
from their care placements until they are properly prepared

and ready to move on to the next stage of their lives. This will ensure young people's wishes and feelings are respected and that they are fully involved in decisions that affect them.

Moves should only take place if young people are properly prepared (DfES, 2007, p.11)

Secondly, it extended the entitlement for care leavers to the support of a personal advisor up to age twenty-five, if they were in education or training.

The Social Exclusion Task Force also focused on the area of care leavers in the report 'Realising young potential' (Cabinet Office, 2009), with key recommendations for improvements in the areas of housing, employment, pathway planning and integrated working. Harber and Oakley (2012) and Cosis Brown (2014) echo the phrase 'realising potential' in criticising children's services for failure.

To summarise this section, the emergence of the concept of children's rights (Munro *et al.*, 2011) influenced a change in the conceptualisation of childhood, with children being viewed as social actors in their own right. One consequence of this was the growing importance of giving children a voice, linked to ideas of empowerment (as suggested by, for example, O'Kane, 2008). The New Labour period saw the growth in measurement and targets, which highlighted the poor outcomes for many care leavers. Legislation was introduced to address key failings, such as young people leaving care too early, aiming to improve their life chances.

2.3 Coalition government (2010-2015)

The coalition government of 2010 strengthened the drive for more adoption, for example in the Children and Families Act (Great Britain Parliament, 2014), although this remains as an option for only a minority of looked after children; and stressed the need for a move away from centrally led services to local responses. Terminology changed too, with a shift from targets and outcomes to 'results and impact' (NCAS, 2010), although it could be suggested that this is simply rewording the same concepts. The focus on care leavers continued with the issuing of new guidance entitled 'Planning for transitions to adulthood for looked after children' (DfE, 2011).

The coalition government introduced a Care leaver strategy (HM Government, 2013a) to ensure a range of services considered the needs of young people leaving care, but the document suggested several areas in which guidance would be issued rather than many concrete initiatives. The strategy begins by stating the problem, namely that care leavers 'leave home at a younger age and have more abrupt transitions to adulthood than their peers' (p.4), in spite of many young people expressing the view that they wish to stay in care for longer. The result was that 'the first decade of adult life is often disrupted, unstable and troubled' which 'can lead to social exclusion, long term unemployment or involvement in crime' (p.4). The participatory peer research evaluations of the pilot programmes to extend care, 'Staying Put' and

'Right2BCared4', were positive (Lushey and Munro, 2014) and subsequently local authorities were required to extend 'Staying Put'.

The strategy was reviewed after one year (HM Government, 2014). The report welcomed the extension of the 'Staying Put' programme but highlighted that 'a small minority of care leavers are placed in unsuitable 'Bed & Breakfast' (B&B) accommodation, in a few cases for an extended period of time' (p.12). As the strategy discussed funding for tackling homelessness it is clear that problems with accommodation persisted.

The Children's Commissioner for England has a special focus on looked after children and care leavers. Her 'State of the Nation' report returned to familiar themes: its first recommendation was that 'It is essential that children's views are sought and influence all decisions that are made about them and that all decisions are fully explained to them' (Children's Commissioner, 2015). The call to stop children being pushed out of care too early was repeated in this document, with the CSJ (2015, p.12) confirming that leaving care continues to be a 'cliff-edge'. Therefore, it could be suggested that a range of pilot programmes, evaluations, guidance documents and reports have been calling for the extension of care for years, but progress has remained extremely slow.

The report 'Children in Care' by the Commons Public Accounts Committee (2015) on developments since 2010 was damning, in particular regarding the DfE, which the report said should be leading positive change but instead...

shows an alarming reluctance to play an active role in securing better services and outcomes for children in care. It chooses to limit its role to passing legislation, publishing guidance and intervening after Ofsted has failed a local authority service. It does far too little to disseminate actively what works and to support authorities to improve...a step change is required in the Department's attitude and leadership (CPAC, 2015).

Research throughout this period (for example Bywaters, 2015) continued to show that the same problems were faced by young people leaving care. The most recent figures show that the care population has grown, with 69,540 children looked after for at least 12 months continuously on 31 March 2015, an increase of 1 percent from 2014 and an increase of 6 percent since 2011 (DfE, 2016a).

2.4 Current dominant discourses in social policy

This section focuses on two dominant discourses which recur in social policy and government guidance: social exclusion and the benefits of multi-agency teams. 'Discourse' is used here to refer to 'socially organised frameworks of meaning that define categories and specify domains of what can be said and done' (Burman, 2008b, p.2).

2.4.1 Social Exclusion

The Social Exclusion Unit was created by New Labour in 1997 as part of that government's avowed aim of identifying where problems in society lay and then tackling them. Statistics about looked after children came to general view because of the managerialist adoption of targets, with an emphasis on measurable outcomes. The inequalities which were apparent in the statistics prompted a range of research. Social policy was shaped by three broad goals: social exclusion should be prevented; if it happened, it was important to reintegrate people; and there was a need to deliver basic minimum standards to everyone (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001, p.6).

New Labour has been praised for its drive to reduce poverty and tackle social exclusion (for example Giddens, 1998), while others have examined this concept more critically. Axford (2008, 2010) explores how the discourse relating to social exclusion shifted from concern with changing structural disadvantage to blaming those who are excluded. The Guidance for 'Staying Put' states its aim is 'To ensure young people can remain with their former foster carers until they are prepared for adulthood, can experience a transition akin to their peers, avoid social exclusion and be more likely to avert a subsequent housing and tenancy breakdown' (HM Government, 2013b, p.4). This shifts from the young person's welfare to the desire to avoid costly problems within one sentence. The cost to society over a lifetime of a care leaver who experiences the worst outcomes, such as prison, is estimated at £337,204 (CSJ, 2014, p.11). The drive to eliminate social exclusion can be

seen as a drive for cohesion to serve the purposes of those who are most advantaged by the current system, including saving money. Because 'inequality in a democratic, pluralist system needs legitimation and it is through various types of discourse and communication that such ideological consent is manufactured' (van Dijk, 1994, p.34) it is essential to examine critically the discourses which promote conformity.

Levitas outlines three discourses in relation to social exclusion, which are examined by Evans and Spicer (2008) – SID, MUD, and RED. These can be specifically applied to looked after children. SID is the Social Integrationist Discourse which suggests that all members of society need to be in employment to avoid being excluded: this discourse seems to be applied to looked after children, and indeed to young people in general. 'MUD' is the Moral Underclass Discourse which suggests that some people are too deviant to wish to be socially included: again this can be related to looked after children, as seen in the studies about drug use (Newburn and Pearson, 2001), and teenage pregnancy (Chase *et al.*, 2006; Knight, Chase and Aggleton, 2006; Mackie and Patel-Kanwal, 2003) amongst those in and from care. RED is the Redistributive Discourse which stresses the obligation for society to distribute wealth more fairly. There are efforts to target extra funding for looked after children, for example with the pupil premium plus which is given to schools, and with bursaries for Higher Education, but overall government statistics suggest that looked after children are much less likely than the general population to go on to pursue successful careers (CSJ,

2014). Evans and Spicer (2008) also criticise the focus on children as service users as it positions children as consumers.

Measures taken in order to prevent social exclusion, or to promote social inclusion, have been criticised as being more focused on social control than on the wellbeing of individuals. Rose (2000) suggests that 'circuits of inclusion' rely on constant monitoring of individuals' conduct. 'Social inclusion as a strategy for redressing inequality and disadvantage disallows criticism of what one is being included into and so social inclusion precludes an interrogation of how supposedly inclusionary policies actually rely upon exclusion' (Burman, 2008a, p.191). Skeggs (2011) examines how 'personhood' has been reduced to a limited set of attitudes and behaviours which are not accessible or desirable to many groups deemed to be 'excluded'. Featherstone (2006) critiques the idea of the social investment state where children are invested in to ensure that they grow up to be citizens who contribute to society and replicate power relations.

Discourses which stress 'normality', such as those dominant in the area of child development, position looked after children as one of many vulnerable groups, along with young carers, teenage parents, and so on (for example Cowie, 2012). This stigmatising of groups of children and young people deemed to be at risk, and therefore in need of intervention, contributes to contemporary moral panics (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994) about youth in crisis. The recent emphasis on social exclusion can be read as an insistence on compliance to dominant norms, for example in relation to employment.

Rose (2000) explains how in the new 'politics of conduct', the problems of marginalised individuals are framed as moral and ethical problems, meaning they relate to how these individuals understand themselves and their lives. 'This ethical reformulation opens the possibility for a whole range of psychological techniques to be recycled in programmes for governing 'the excluded'' (p.334). He defines inclusion as being 'enmeshed' in continuous self-improvement and consumption, whereas those who do not have the skills, or desire, to conform to this behaviour, are excluded and judged to be in need of remediation. Rose is critical of how the discourse of empowerment 'codes the subjective substrate of exclusion as lack of self-esteem, self-worth and the skills of self-management necessary to steer oneself as an active individual in the empire of choice' (p.334). These individual failings therefore necessitate the intervention of experts.

2.4.2 Benefits of multi-agency teams

A term in current use is 'Team Around the Child' (Siraj-Blatchford, Clarke and Needham, 2007), which draws together ideas of safeguarding and collaborative working. There has been confusion surrounding the terminology to describe integrated children's services but Anning (2006) suggests that 'multi-agency teams' is the term which dominates, covering many different models of working, including 'team around the child'. Fitzgerald and Kay (2008) show that collaborative working is not a new idea, and discuss the different levels of collaborative working, from multi-agency (low level of integration) to transdisciplinary (high level). They claim that '(e)ffective

partnership working can be beneficial to both families and practitioners as it can enhance understanding of the family culture, deepen awareness of each situation and enhance the respect for families' (p.4) – although it is not clear how. Conversely, in a review of the literature around multi-agency working and its implications for practice, Atkinson, Jones and Lamont (2007) suggest that there is evidence of benefits for professionals but not for service users. They state that there has been extensive research into models of multi-agency teams, identifying facilitators and barriers and aiming to promote good practice, and there 'is therefore a wealth of information for practitioners to draw on' (p.85). Anning (2006), in her explanation of the Multi-Agency Teamwork for Children's Services (MATCh) project, links her findings to wider policy changes, such as workforce reform, Children's Trusts and the Children's Fund. She concludes that 'despite Labour government enthusiasm for joined-up services, we have little robust evidence of the impact of reshaping services on either outcomes or processes' (p.8). Hymans (2008) explores how professional identity evolves in multi-agency working, noting that differing cultural practices can be a barrier to effective collaborative working. The benefits of multi-agency teams are unquestioned, such as sharing information to prevent a child 'slipping through the net', but it is not clear that they outweigh the disadvantages – for example a young person feeling that they are a case being discussed by several adults, who know all about them without the young person knowing anything about the adults (Rixon, 2008a, p.225).

Harker *et al.* (2004b, p.191) recommend a holistic approach, and Rixon (2008b) discusses the need for changes in attitudes from professionals, advocating training. One of the functions of multi-agency teams in this area of children's services is to train new members in current practices, to ensure the continuation of existing approaches and procedures. For foster carers, training is ongoing. Foley (2008,p.251) reflects critically on the focus on skills for foster carers, highlighting that characteristics such as liking children and having a sense of humour are what are deemed to be important by young people themselves, but cannot easily be described as 'skills'. She poses the key question: 'How genuine is it possible for institutional care to be?' (p.255). Barnes (2007) highlights the tensions between caring responsibilities and advocacy, where advocacy suggests putting forward the views of the child without imposing adult views on whether or not these views constitute what is in the best interests of the child. Social work is grounded in theories of child development (Barnes, 2007) therefore social workers judge a child's opinions and decisions against normative measures of how 'developed' they are.

In a Foucauldian analysis of participatory processes for children, Gallagher argues that

beneath the monolithic appearance of corporate and governmental decision making, one finds that such decisions are 'powerful' only because they are implemented by vast networks of people...through their everyday actions upon one another' (2008, p.400).

He rejects the 'utilitarian instrumental rationality' (p.403) governing childhood, which focuses on measurable 'objective' outcomes, and argues instead for close analysis of exactly how power relations are enacted. Lushey and Munro (2014) explain how care leavers feel that adults become subject to 'pathway planning syndrome', leading to a focus on completing forms rather than on the young person. One of the roles of Leaving Care Teams is to produce a pathway plan, but half of care leavers in a study by the CSJ (2015, p.6) say they do not have one.

Rose (2000) draws upon Foucault's concept of governmentality to examine critically the prevalence of multi-agency teams. He suggests that 'the increasing emphasis on case conferences, multidisciplinary teams, sharing information, keeping records, making plans, setting targets (and) establishing networks of surveillance and documentation of the potentially risky individual' (p.333) works to create knowledge about these individuals, which is mobilised to pathologise them.

These two discourses of social exclusion and the benefits of multi-agency teams can be drawn together in an examination of neoliberalism. Rose (2000) suggests that social exclusion has shifted from being focused on structural disadvantage towards individual deficits, in what he terms an 'alloy of autonomization and responsabilization' (p,324), where those judged to be at risk require expert intervention. Wacquant (2012) explains how neoliberal societies create a 'Centaur-state', liberal at the top and paternalistic at the bottom. Thus, government gives banks and businesses free rein, but 'is

fiercely interventionist and authoritarian when it comes to dealing with the destructive consequences of economic deregulation for those at the lower end of the class and status spectrum'. Similarly, wider social problems such as tackling child poverty are no longer priorities for government, but enforcing strict rules for unemployed people is deemed to be vitally important (Toynbee, 2015).

Oksala (2013) explores further how neoliberalism is not just about anti-regulation of markets, but has expanded from economics into all areas of society. She analyses how, for Foucault, 'neoliberalism is crucially treated as a form of governmentality, a rationality of governance that produces new kinds of political subjects and a new organization of the social realm' (Oksala, 2013, p.34). Foucault urges us to focus on the particular interactions which work to maintain macro-relations of power: 'Generally speaking I think one needs to look...at how the great strategies of power encrust themselves and depend for their conditions of exercise on the micro-relations of power' (Foucault, 1980, p.199 in Hook, 2007, p.241). From this perspective, it can be seen that the care system is constrained by macro-systems of government policy and neoliberal society, but these are operationalised at the micro-level with interactions amongst adults, and between adults and young people.

2.4.3 The Care leaver strategy, 2016

The recent 'Keep on Caring' strategy (HM Government, 2016) does not include the terms 'social exclusion' or 'multi-agency teams', although it returns

to familiar criticisms of pathway planning (p.16) and poor outcomes where 'there has been limited improvement over time' (p.15). The three drivers identified rely more on business terms than the discourse of social exclusion, calling for a local offer which includes innovation to drive system improvement. Closer inspection, however, reveals that the five outcomes resonate with those from 'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2003), and the document gives many examples of where leaving care teams should work with other agencies. Following the Narey Review (DfE, 2016b), a welcome development is the piloting of 'Staying Close' (HM Government, 2016), where young people leaving residential care will be supported to live near the home they have just left and to stay in close contact during a period of transition.

2.5 An overview of research: Practical, Psychological and Sociological approaches

2.5.1 Practical approaches

The last two decades have seen a growing body of research being commissioned by government, charities and research institutes to investigate the outcomes for children in care in England (for example Jackson and Martin, 1998; Broad, 1998; Bhabra, Ghate and Brazier, 2002; Harker *et al* 2003, 2004a, 2004b; Stein and Munro, 2008). This research has built up a body of evidence which has had an impact on guidance for schools and local authorities such as on the 'Care Matters' guidance (DfES, 2007). It is noteworthy that many of the studies express reservations regarding their

small sample size in comparison to the number of looked after children (for example, Berridge, 2009).

A substantial sub-set of the research into outcomes for looked after children has concentrated on educational outcomes, perhaps because this is an area where outcomes can be clearly measured and comparisons made between children in care and the general population of children. Much of this research combines quantitative analysis of statistics with qualitative analysis of interviews and focus groups. An early contribution to the research is from Jackson and Martin (1998) who collected data through 105 questionnaires and thirty-eight semi-structured interviews. They identify factors which support attainment, including stability, attendance, a significant adult relationship, and developing out-of-school interests. In the belief that instability in placements causes instability in education, several studies have focused on how to promote continuity. Brown and Sen (2014) examine how kinship care can provide stability for looked after children, but may also prolong existing problems in relationships. In a study of disrupted placements, Taylor and McQuillan (2014) find that disruption was often due to the child's behaviour and to their contact with the birth family. These studies show that the churn in looked after children's lives can be caused by a complex interaction of multiple factors.

Mallon (2005), in unstructured interviews with eighteen care-experienced adults in Scotland, lists fifteen risk factors encountered by children in care. As well as pre-care and post-care risk factors which have an impact on general

well-being and educational outcomes, participants identified deficiencies in relationships, such as a lack of love and affection; low self-regard, for example feeling that they did not belong; instability; an absence of support for education; and physical abuse. While Mallon (2005) is particularly scathing about the role of social workers in the lives of children in care, locating the blame for these risk factors with them, the conclusion from his research can be drawn that it is not surprising that looked after children often fail to achieve academically. Connelly and Chakrabarti (2008) suggest that problems persist in Scotland, even though the Scottish Parliament has made a priority of improving outcomes for looked after children. The situation is similar in other Western societies, with slow progress being made on addressing inequalities, for example in Australia (Cashmore, Paxman and Townsend, 2007).

In the most recent statistical release, 68 percent of looked after children who had been in care for twelve months, eligible to take GCSEs (which are the standard national examination in England for sixteen year-olds), were identified as having special educational needs (DfE, 2016a), compared with the general population at 20 percent. Berridge (2009) gathered statistical data on pupil progress, as well as interviews, questionnaires and surveys. He found that, in one local authority, 45 percent of children in care had been assessed and given statements, which was the process for identifying a child with more individual needs, and the support they required. In the general population the proportion was 2 percent. The selected category of special educational need is unclear and Berridge warns against confusing behavioural difficulties with learning difficulties, but perhaps the

disproportionately high rate of statements in children in care could be explained by this confusion (O'Sullivan and Westerman, 2007). The overlap between special educational needs and difficulties arising from troubled upbringings is discussed by Comfort (2007, p.32), who examines the commonality between emotional needs and learning needs.

To summarise this section, 'Young people who lose interest in education, often because it offers them no chance of success, can become caught up in a vicious cycle of cumulative disadvantage' (Jackson and Simon, 2006, p.47). It has been suggested that experiences before coming into care affect the young people's development (for example Cooper and Johnson, 2007). Furthermore, looked after children may behave in ways which are judged as unacceptable in school environments, as proposed by Berridge (2009). They are therefore more likely to be identified as having special educational needs, while any difficulties they may experience are only compounded by lack of stability and other gaps in support identified by Mallon (2005).

2.5.1.1 What can schools do to promote success?

There is the potential for schools to provide a stable environment for looked after children, with consistency in relationships, particularly in the primary phase. Schools can promote

the development of self-worth, well-being and social competence...Indeed, after the family environment, schools are

probably the second most effective environments for building up independence skills, promoting self-efficacy and developing the problem-solving skills of children and young people, especially those who have experienced negative life events (Cameron and Maginn, 2009, p.87).

These authors suggest that schools need to promote a sense of belonging and encourage development of resilience in looked after children. As these qualities are hard to measure, schools are judged instead on how well they improve the educational attainment of their pupils.

Successive governments, from New Labour through the coalition to the current Conservative government, have invested in numerous initiatives to address the problem of low educational achievement. These include increasing the pupil premium plus (DfE, 2016a) which provides individual funding for targeted pupils; giving looked after children priority in school admissions; having a designated teacher in each school who is responsible for the looked after children in that setting; providing enrichment activities, private tutoring, Personal Education Plans and Personal Education Allowances; and piloting Virtual Schools in eleven local authorities where all children in care belong to the school they attend but also a Virtual School for looked after children (Berridge, 2009). Some of these initiatives seem to have been successful, such as the Virtual Schools, and this has led to the creation of Virtual Schools in every local authority, with the power to spend the pupil premium plus on looked after children. Driscoll (2013b) highlights how they

have been successful in supporting pupils in transition, but personal contacts reveal that funding for Virtual Schools is being cut. In addition, the inspection agency Ofsted are required to examine the progress of disadvantaged children (Ofsted, 2013) but despite them examining looked after children specifically, there remains an unacceptable gap between them and their peers (DfE, 2016a).

2.5.2 Psychological approaches

Much of the research in the area of looked after children has focused on key themes from psychology: motivation, resilience and attachment. Gilligan (2007) stresses the importance of motivation for young people in care, suggesting that a range of strategies (for example out-of-school clubs and mentoring) should be employed to encourage their success in any area, from baking to looking after pets. Moran (2007, p.35) suggests that 'schools have an important role to play in fostering resilience and motivation in looked after children'. Newman (2004, in Moran, 2007, p. 36) proposes six resilience domains which schools should aim to provide for all children, but which can be particularly beneficial to children in care: these are 'a sense of belonging, education, friendships, self-esteem, empathy and self-efficacy'.

Chase, Simon and Jackson (2006, p.1) bring together research with children in care from a range of professional perspectives: social care, education, economics, health promotion, pedagogy, psychology and statistics. The underlying premise which unites the contributors is their belief in a positive

approach to improving outcomes for looked after children, with a focus on a 'strengths' perspective, building resilience and the importance of experiencing success (p.8). 'By presenting young people in and leaving care solely as victims of systems that fail them, we risk ignoring and undermining the role they themselves play in determining their own futures, and the resilience and resourcefulness that many possess' (p.2). The different research projects stress the importance of children having opportunities to state their wishes and influence choices made in their lives.

A number of studies have examined the role of aspirations in the lives of looked after children (for example Broad, 2008; Jackson and Ajayi, 2007; Jackson, Ajayi and Quigley, 2005; and Stadler, 2007). They have been defined as 'dreams and hopes about life and the self belief that they can be achieved' (Broad, 2008, p.1). This definition links to resilience as it shows aspirations are not only aims, but rely also on confidence that those aims can be achieved.

Schofield and Beek (2009) write from a social work perspective aiming at improving understanding and practice in the field of social work with children in care. Their work aims 'to increase our understanding of the transformational power of foster family relationships over time and particularly in adolescence' (p.255). The authors underpin their argument with psychological theory, specifically attachment theory; the importance of resilience and social capital; and the secure base model of caregiving. Schofield and Beek seem to suggest that foster carers should be heroic and self-sacrificing to support the children they look after through adolescence and into adulthood. Yet it should

not be claimed that all responsibility lies with them. Fostering is not well-paid, and there is an urgent shortage of foster placements (the Fostering Network in 2009 estimated a shortfall of 10,000 placements), therefore local authorities do not often have the luxury of selecting from a range of excellent options: this problem is ignored by the authors. They make little mention of school, which disregards the important role which education could and should play in providing stability and positive opportunities in the lives of young people in care (Cameron and Maginn, 2009). Local authorities are the corporate parent for these children, so must also take responsibility for such things as promoting co-operation as suggested in the secure base model. There is widespread recognition, however, that foster care must be professionalised, with increased authority, training and financial reward for foster carers (Cosis Brown, 2014).

Cameron (2007), in a study of care leavers studying for educational qualifications, expands on the frequent theme of resilience to suggest that care leavers adopt self-reliance instead. This is a combination of resilience and a belief and aptitude in one's own agency in overcoming obstacles. 'In many cases, the key to success was reliance on their own resources, taking the initiative, rather than relying on any external sources of formal support, regardless of availability' (p.47). Interestingly, she points out that this self-reliance can be seen as being 'difficult' by services supporting the care leaver, when it may be a reasonable response to previous experiences of being let down.

The concept of self-reliance can be linked to Roesch-Marsh's (2014) analysis of 'out-of-control' behaviour for young people in secure accommodation in Scotland. Roesch-Marsh explains that this behaviour was socially constructed and subject to varying influences, differing, for example, depending on gender. For managers, 'out-of-control' behaviour was framed within discussions of chronic or acute risk, whereas for referring practitioners it was rationalised as a cry for help in reaction to previous traumas. In contrast, young people themselves often discussed their behaviour as an expression of their dissatisfaction with a situation.

In a review of research in the field of young people leaving care, Stein (2006) suggests that using resilience as a framework allows the identification of three classes of care leavers. These are 'Moving on' – young people who can succeed in putting their difficult experiences behind them; 'Survivors' – those who feel that they have struggled to overcome difficult circumstances but can do so with appropriate support; and 'Victims' – who feel that they have little chance of success and who need intensive support. Driscoll (2013a) also focuses on the importance of resilience, particularly at the key stage of transition to adulthood, suggesting that this can be promoted with supportive relationships. Snow (2008) echoes this when stating 'What young people ask for consistently is enduring and meaningful interpersonal relationships'.

The linked points of resilience and relationships are repeated in the suggestions made by the Children's Commissioner (2015), who argues that children must have more stable contact with their social worker as well as a long-term relationship throughout and after their time in care, and 'Every child

in care should have access to high quality therapeutic care that will enable them to recover from past harm and build resilience and emotional well-being'. Winkler (2014) develops a model which links resilience to reflexivity, suggesting that children need to be supported to develop reflexive skills.

It could be argued that the shift in the reasons for children being taken into care, from poverty historically, to more recent evidence of the reasons being predominantly abuse and neglect (61 percent according to the DfE (2016a)), has encouraged the change towards a focus on psychological approaches. These can be criticised as being too concerned with viewing looked after children as 'cases' in need of remediation. The suggestions above regarding acceptance, sensitivity and resilience can be viewed as what Skeggs (2005, p.973) calls 'therapy speak', where terms such as 'trauma' are used to make ethical and individual judgments. Hook (2007, p.26) argues that Foucault 'leaves little room for doubt regarding psychology's complicity in the procedures and agendas of disciplinarity'. The goal of a culture of disciplinarity is 'normalization, that is, the generation of productive, docile self-regulatory souls' (p.37). In this conception, building resilience can be seen as a method of ensuring compliance and eliminating deviance rather than a method of empowerment.

Burman (2008b) highlights in particular the dominance of developmental psychology, which

more than any other variety of psychology, has a powerful impact on our everyday lives and ways of thinking about ourselves. Its effects are so great that they are often almost imperceptible, taken-for-granted features about our expectations of ourselves, others, parents, children and families' (p.2).

In particular, she is critical of the failure to examine the context of children's lives, which 'contributes to individualist interpretations of socially structured phenomena that can lapse into victim blaming' (pp. 5-6). Her consideration of context links to sociological approaches.

2.5.3 Sociological approaches

Some researchers are critical of the focus on practical and psychological approaches, claiming that these do not address the wider underlying problems facing looked after children. Berridge (2009) accepts that early abuse and neglect can have significant long-term effects, but argues that research in this area needs to move beyond psychological approaches to consider sociological theories. He states that too complete an acceptance of evidence-based practice runs the risk of failing to challenge wider social policy (Berridge, 2007). Webb (2001, p.57) is critical of 'how the evidence-based preoccupation with positivistic methods and determinate judgments entraps social workers within a narrow form of technical rationality'. He argues that decision-making cannot be tightly controlled as required by managerialist

strategies, because the complexities of human relationships mean that decisions are influenced by local factors and individual reflexivity. Stein further argues that much research in this field has failed to link empirical and theoretical work, stressing that most studies to date 'are detached from theory in terms of context, conceptual exploration, or theory building' (Stein, 2006, p.278). Holland (2009), however, suggests that there is a move towards a more theoretical basis for research with looked after children. Her international comparative review gives examples of theoretical approaches, many of which are psychological.

Renold led a team which critically analyses participatory research for looked after children in the ExtraOrdinary Lives project, where ethics are situated, dialogic and political. They discuss 'ethics-in-practice' linked to critical reflexivity and the ongoing process of 'becoming participant'. Their critical social work framework countered 'the prevalent outcomes-based research of children in public care, which consistently represents them in terms of their social problems' (Renold *et al.*, 2008, p.430). They argue studies should avoid 'Othering' participants by adding to their surveillance: 'The translation of difference into Othering is a denial of dialogue, interaction and change (Pickering, 2001, p.49 in Krumer-Nevo, 2002, p.304). Krumer-Nevo (2002) explains how Othering involves the creation of division between 'us' and 'them', and the belief that 'we' possess positive qualities while 'they' possess negative. 'The differentiation between 'us' and 'them' leads to a devaluation of the Other (Krumer-Nevo, 2002, p.304). Renold *et al.* argue that researchers should not read case files, thereby enabling the disruption of the 'social work

gaze' on the lives of looked after children. This critical, reflexive, ethically-focused approach sits in opposition to the large body of work focused on evidence-based practice.

McLeod (2007) warns against an over-simplification of 'giving young people a voice', and explains how looked after children may wish to assert their own agenda rather than follow that of the researcher. She suggests that 'listening to children' has become a sort of orthodoxy to which lip service is paid, giving the example of situations where social workers felt they had worked hard to elicit the perspectives of young people but those young people felt that they had not been heard. Young people can resist attempts to prise their views from them by a range of techniques – avoidance, active resistance, aggression, passive resistance, exaggeration, denial, fantasy and changing the subject (McLeod, 2007, p.281-283) and these must be recognised as their legitimate resistance to adult agendas. Milbourne (2009) highlights the danger of drifting from a position of 'valuing difference' into securing compliance with dominant discourses. The prevalence of neoliberal concepts of individual responsibility and competition can prevent other approaches from being recognised.

2.6 Focus on care leavers

Concern about the gap in academic achievement between looked after children and the general population feeds into general disquiet about the difference in life chances for young people once they leave care. Ward (2011)

stresses the importance of a persistent sense of self throughout the life course. She proposes that identity is a mix of continuity and change, suggesting that looked after children have little opportunity to conserve continuity. Leaving care can be a 'flashpoint' where they can lose a sense of self, leading to negative outcomes. Frech (2012) suggests that it can be damaging for adolescents in their transition to adulthood to have either a lack of support or an over-reliance on peer support, both of which are potential risks for looked after children. Fransson and Storø (2011, p.2524) argue that care leavers must 'work extremely hard to get positive recognition from others', especially when they are struggling to find work and appropriate housing. Munro, Lushey and Ward (2012, p.11) suggest that their social networks contract when they leave care, resulting in a lack of support.

Many young people face the challenges discussed here, however, whether in care or not. Sinclair, McKendrick and Scott (2010) in a study of young people in a deprived community explore the debate around social exclusion discussed above. They argue that the New Labour government stressed personal responsibility. Their study shows that being fast-tracked to adulthood was negative, and early entry to the labour market could lead to 'churn' with periods of unemployment interspersed with short-term, unsatisfactory periods of low-paid work.

Presenting an argument for more resources to be allocated to Leaving Care teams in local authorities, and for these resources to be used partly for partnership work with Youth Offending teams, Evans (2013, p.196) mobilises

discourses of risk and vulnerability, prevalent in children's services, saying that care leavers face a

daily struggle to negotiate the hostile terrain awaiting them on leaving the Looked After Children's system. This transition to independence has always been characterised by risk, but in a context within which local authorities are struggling to meet their statutory responsibilities to their most vulnerable citizens, the fragile packages of care and support being handed to these young people are prone to unravel. Unlike most other young people, the safety nets of family and friends with social capital are generally not available to them when things go wrong.

Evans goes on, however, to suggest that one way to escape these problems is through making 'good' decisions. 'It should be remembered that many of these young people are at risk of making poor decisions; not only because they are deprived of the traditional supports of family, but also because their cognitive and emotional development has often been impaired by trauma, abuse and neglect' (Evans, 2013, p.197). Children's services aim to empower young people to make decisions for themselves, but this is undermined by the negative view of looked after children's capacity to take decisions. Young people are categorised as being 'impaired' because of the experiences they have had, which limits their ability to make 'good choices'.

2.7 Conclusion to literature review

The literature reviewed has highlighted the persistence of problems for looked after children, in particular as they approach leaving care. The gap in attainment between looked after 16 year-olds and their peers is stark, and only slow progress is being made, for example with an increase from 12 to 14 percent of looked after children achieving 5 A*-C GCSEs including English and Mathematics over the last year (DfE, 2016a). It is relevant, therefore, to explore how adults working within the field approach the challenges of 'the transition to adulthood'. Government guidance over decades has identified that young people leave care before they are ready, and without stable and enduring relationships. It is pertinent, therefore, to examine closely the plans which are made in the period before leaving care to explore what efforts are made to avoid the problems identified above and promote a successful transition. This leads to the following research issue: **An exploration of plans for care leavers devised by the adults who work with them.**

In an evaluation of best practice, Munro, Lushey and Ward (2011, p.3) state that 'Young people valued plans that explored how their current circumstances might change, when goals were set and when it was clear what services the local authority would supply in order to support them in their transition to adulthood'. A range of bodies, including Ofsted, the National Audit Office and Catch22 highlight that too many care leavers' services are poor at pathway planning (Lepper, 2015), which contributes to negative outcomes. It is relevant to explore how planning is approached, and whether

there is a lack of cohesion in planning, which could be the cause of future problems. As this examination of the literature shows, poor outcomes for care leavers remains an intransigent problem, suggesting it is necessary to explore underlying reasons for current practice.

Research questions:

- 1. What is the congruence of views amongst adult participants regarding plans for the future of care leavers they work with?**
- 2. How do they explain why they hold these views?**
- 3. What are the social and political implications of these views?**

3. Methodology

3.1 Starting-point

Research into looked after children's experiences can be divided into three broad categories: research reviews, which are often international (for example, Munro, Stein and Ward, 2005; Stein, 2006; Holland, 2009); statistical analyses (for example, O'Sullivan and Westerman, 2007; Rowlands and Statham, 2009); and the majority of studies, which are qualitative and seek to give young people and their carers a voice (for example, Harker *et al.*, 2003, 2004a, 2004b; Cameron, 2007; Broad, 2008). The initial appeal to me of participatory research was challenged as soon as I began reading more widely for the literature review. The very substantial body of participatory research (eg Berridge, 2007) showed that my goal of 'giving young people a voice' was far from new, and could be criticised for seeming to assume that children from a care background form a homogeneous group which can be represented by small samples. This is clearly not the case: the term 'looked after children' covers a baby in short-term foster care as well as an adolescent experiencing repeated spells in secure accommodation (Ward, Skuse and Munro, 2005).

On the other hand, the focus on outcomes for this group (DfE, 2016a) does show that they are disadvantaged so, rather than abandoning the idea of research on a target set who are not really a set, I decided to proceed, but with an awareness of the complexity of the 'group' and of the limitations of

discussing looked after children as some sort of unit. The range was further reduced by deciding to focus on care leavers, because research (such as Stein and Munro, 2008) and government guidance (for example, HM Government, 2016) has continued to show that, despite investment in and changing policy for looked after children, the point of leaving care can be a chop which leads to negative outcomes.

3.2 Theoretical influences

At the outset my standpoint aspired to be emancipatory, based on a model of childhood which recognises that children have agency, and for the researcher 'it is their respondents who are the 'experts'' (Pattman and Kehily, 2004, p. 134). I aimed to use personal construct theory (Kelly, 1963) as a framework for participants to express their own unique understandings of the situation. Personal construct theory seemed appropriate because of the possibility it offers as a starting point for positive transformation (Pope and Denicolo, 2001). Advocates of participatory research with children (rather than on children), such as Alderson (2008) and O'Kane (2008), stress the importance of redressing the power imbalance between researcher and participants, but while the participants may have control over the data they disclose, the researcher has the power to interpret the data as they choose, although this can be checked by participant validation.

There are questions about how far the redressing of the power imbalance is possible (Lushey and Munro, 2014): while participants hold power in that they

have what the researcher wishes to research, the researcher has always set the agenda, particularly in research with children. There are doubts about when children really have the power to refuse to co-operate with adults (David, Edwards and Alldred, 2001). Ethical questions are also raised by engaging practitioners in research. The researcher must be aware that social research can draw out criticisms of practice and that 'there may be a subtle tyranny to participatory research that requires careful examination and reflection' (Iphofen, 2009, p,130). Holland critiques research on looked after children which 'can be seen to be contributing to the professional gaze on private aspects of the everyday lives of young people in care, and even to a categorisation of them as pathologised 'other'' (Holland, 2009, p.231). My initial enthusiasm for participatory research was undermined by the realisation that I would be pursuing my own ends without necessarily achieving anything for the young people involved. Flick (2014) gives many examples of ethical dilemmas for qualitative researchers in the social sciences, arising from their aim to increase understanding rather than to solve problems.

A social constructionist epistemology requires an acceptance of the situated, complex and inter-related nature of knowledge. Although it can be argued that adherence to a social constructionist position undermines any attempt to provide neat answers to questions, it does not follow that 'relativism appears to undermine our attempts to morally ground our actions, our choices and politics' (Burr, 2003, p.81). While knowledge is situated, this does not mean that values are worthless. Although 'social constructionists argue that research methods construct social realities as much as they might describe or

'discover' them' (Cousin, 2010, p.11), I am drawn to those social constructionists who advocate a critical approach. We may accept that many interpretations are possible while still believing that it is worthwhile to expose injustice, not simply as an intellectual exercise but as a first step towards positive change. Inequity for care leavers is a clear, long-standing problem which has exercised me to attempt to add to the body of knowledge in this area.

The literature review identified that calls to prevent young people leaving care before they are ready have been repeated over decades. This suggests two areas for investigation: firstly, what is actually happening as young people move towards leaving care, and secondly, what are the systemic barriers to solving this long-standing problem. A small-scale study such as this can explore possible explanations for the intransigence of the problem by examining practitioners' perspectives and the reasons they give for their actions. As stated above, 'discourse' here refers to social constructions of meaning which categorise and limit thought and action (Burman, 2008b, p.2). It is proposed that working practices which continue to move care leavers on too early are maintained by discourses which contradict the stated aims of policy documents.

Developing a social constructionist approach over time can embrace the complexity of the topic under examination, which affords no easy answers, while also allowing that there is a point to the research. Burr states that 'an explicit aim of the social constructionist is to deconstruct the discourses which

uphold inequitous [sic] power relations and to demonstrate the way in which they obscure these' (2003, p.84). I have become more self-critical over the course of my study. While still keeping a concern for social justice, I have realised that this position runs the risk of me imposing my own views about what would be 'better', and being overly critical of adults working within the constraints of a difficult system. Critical discourse analysis (Gee, 2010), from a social constructionist perspective offers the possibility of insight leading to positive change, but also reminds me that the way I have interpreted the literature and the data throughout this study is only one possible construct. There is 'no hidden truth residing somewhere in the data ready to inscribe itself' (Thomas and James, 2006, p.782) but it is possible to construct credible interpretations. This study therefore offers these explorations of issues in the cases examined, with tentative suggestions, acknowledging that other interpretations and suggestions are possible.

Researchers in the field of looked after children have called for a more theoretical basis for studies (for example Berridge, 2007). It can be seen that some studies seem to over-simplify the issues, suggesting that the 'problem' is located within the young people, and can be solved by promoting resilience (for example Jackson, Ajayi and Quigley, 2005); or that the 'problem' lies with carers and they must improve the service they offer (for example Cameron and Maginn, 2009). While both problems undoubtedly do exist, it is unlikely that one or other is the answer to all the difficulties faced by this marginalised group. I aimed therefore to bring together the perspectives of a young person and adults who live and work with them to try to address the complexity of

their situation. Theories which consider the complex interplay between structure and agency have proved helpful in understanding the multifaceted situations faced by young people in and leaving care. I have been influenced by social constructionism's insight that inequality is constructed and therefore not inevitable. I have also been influenced by feminism, noting how Burman (2009, p.137) distinguishes 'between a feminist agenda and appropriations of a pseudo-feminist discourse that now permeate neo-liberal governmentality'. Being open about my values and my belief in the explanatory power of social constructionism also serves as a reminder that the research cannot simply confirm what I thought already, so I must interrogate my interpretations and explanations.

Burman (2006) offers the following perspective on reflexivity. She takes it 'to broadly identify research that refuses the scientific positioning of the neutral observer, to instead highlight and explore the nature of researcher involvement as a relevant resource' (p. 316). However, as with the more general trend towards the 'increasing emotionalisation of public life' (p.317) which serves to render emotions banal and trivial, 'the reflexive call covertly re-centres and re-inscribes a rational, integrated reflecting subject reminiscent of precisely the rational unitary subject of cultural (white, middle-class) masculinity and bourgeois individualism' (p. 323). I must accept the impossibility of avoiding bias, accepting instead that researcher positionality is an inevitable part of the research process and can be explored as such. Furthermore, I must be aware of the different levels of discourse which influence my approach as a researcher.

Research with these young people, therefore, must be built around ethical reflexivity (Macfarlane, 2010), which is often associated with feminist research (Burman, 2009). 'Ethics is also a situated practice inextricably connected with politics and requiring deliberation of many factors – social, personal and political – in the precise socio-political context of a specific case' (Simons, 2009, p.96). The researcher must be sensitive to how their own values and experiences affect the research process, as well as how they affect the participants. It seemed that the only way to tackle these daunting issues was to accept the research process as series of ongoing choices, decisions and interpretations. Regular meetings with my supervisory team have helped to encourage ongoing reflexivity in explaining and justifying the steps in the research process.

3.3 Pilot study

For the pilot study, after gaining ethical approval and informed consent (Appendix A), I interviewed Sam and his foster carers about their aspirations for the future, using personal construct theory (Kelly, 1963) as a framework to guide the data collection methods and analysis. I expected to explore similarities and differences between the child and the adults' constructs about Sam's future. Gewirtz and Cribb (2006, pp. 147-148) propose a comprehensive and nuanced definition of ethical reflexivity which lists five steps in a model of ethical reflexivity which seems useful for my own research. These five actions were applied to the pilot study, and used again later to examine the research process of the main study. I will italicise the key

phrase which links back to Gewirtz and Cribb to clarify the different steps. All names have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

The *evaluative judgment* I worked from was that I could, as a researcher, uncover these constructs and then compare and contrast them. During the interviews, however, I felt that Sam was watching me to see if I was satisfied with what he said: when he said he wanted to join the RAF he visibly relaxed when I expressed my interest in this idea. In the long interview with Sam's foster carers, it was difficult to keep to the topic of Sam's future, as the discussion drifted into the past, other children, problems with children's services and Sam's school, the deficiencies of other foster carers and parents, and the challenges of being a good foster carer.

I had expected to uncover the perspectives of the three participants about Sam's future, and then take the data away to analyse. I had accepted the value of 'giving children a voice' (Alderson, 2004) and thought I was in a position to achieve this, whilst also giving the foster carers a voice. The interviews were interactions where the participants sought to achieve different purposes from the one I had expected, but I realised that this work, such as identity work, did not match personal construct theory. Much of the literature (for example Broad, 2008) written on children in and leaving care is based on the premise of 'giving children a voice', and giving adults a voice, but these *are not sufficiently problematised by others*. I had to acknowledge the *tension between the values* of an enthusiasm for participatory and emancipatory research and the realisation that actually, for Sam, I was just another adult he

did not know who was asking him questions, where he seemed to feel that he had to provide what I would accept as 'satisfactory' answers, rather than gaining anything from the process himself.

The pilot study enabled me to *take seriously the practical judgements and dilemmas of the people I was researching*. The foster carers did have ideas about Sam's future, but they also seemed eager to tell me about the many challenges they faced, and how they often felt they were not supported. This links to *taking responsibility for the political and ethical implications of the research* as it was clear that 'plans for the future' could not be separated into a compartment to be handed over to me, but instead adults would be engaged in different sorts of interactions with me, such as justifying their own decisions and explaining the complexity of their own situation to me. I needed to abandon personal construct theory and adopt a new theoretical framework: this is explored below in the section on critical discourse analysis (CDA).

3.4 Case study research

Although the pilot study led me to rethink my research approach, I remained committed to the interpretivist paradigm and qualitative research as I wished to explore participants' perspectives.

Qualitative research is committed to participants using their own words to make sense of their lives; it places an importance on context and process; it rests on a dialectic

between inductive and deductive reasoning; and uses iterative strategies to comprehend the relationship between social life and individual subjectivities (Luttrell, 2010, pp1-2).

Denzin and Lincoln state that qualitative research is always value-laden and is 'emic, idiographic, case-based' (1998, p.10). Yin (2009, p.2) suggests that 'case studies are the preferred method when (a) 'how' and 'why' questions are being posed, (b) the investigator has little control over events, and (c) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context'. As this study attempts to understand why outcomes are often negative in spite of good intentions and numerous interventions, an explanatory case study is appropriate. Yin warns against researchers collecting data subjectively, but I would argue that it is impossible to do otherwise. The qualitative researcher cannot step outside of his or her own subjectivity, but can be reflexively aware of it.

Stake (1995) compares intrinsic with instrumental case study: this research is the latter, as it is not focused on one child's unique experiences, but rather on exploring issues through the unique views of participants, or actors, as Stake calls them. It is a collective case study, comparing the views of 'groups' – each group consisting of a child in care and key adults who surround them, such as foster carers, teachers and social workers. Comparison is a key aspect of analysis (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Stake urges us to use issues to develop a conceptual framework. 'Issues are not simple and clean, but

intricately wired to political, social, historical, and especially personal contexts' (Stake, 1995, p.17).

Simons' approach to case study fits well with social constructionism, which must be combined with underpinning values. Qualitative case study involves the self in 'a rigorous exploration of how your values and actions shape data gathering and interpretation and how people and events in the field impact on you' (Simons, 2009, p.4). Her emphasis is on in depth understanding of the particular, though with a collective case study such as this there may be the possibility of tentatively proposing some cross-case generalizations.

3.5 Research process

Before beginning this study I had worked with eight of the local authorities in the West Midlands on projects involving looked after children in the preceding few years, and so I approached those where the people I knew were still in post. I explained the aim of my study and gained consent from senior managers, as well as ethical approval from my institution (See Appendix A). I was invited by two of the local authorities to attend group sessions for care leavers as a chance to ask them about their plans for the future, and to request their participation in my research. As the focus of the sessions was on preparation for the future, the gate-keepers judged it would be appropriate for me to ask the care leavers about their plans in a general way as an initial phase of data collection. In each local authority I attended the session and took part in the activities with the young people, before asking for volunteers.

In one-to-one conversations with them, I asked about their current educational situation and then asked about their plans for the future. From Westshire three young people volunteered and gave me the contact details of their carers; and from Eastshire two young people volunteered, but a social work manager asked me to drop one of the cases so I continued with only one. This small opportunistic sample allowed me to explore the case studies in depth, as advocated by Simons (2009).

The second strand of research method involved gaining an understanding of the key adults' views on plans for the future of each young person. Interview questions comprised:

- How long have you known the young person?
- What plans are there for his or her future?
- If you could wave a magic wand, what would you change?

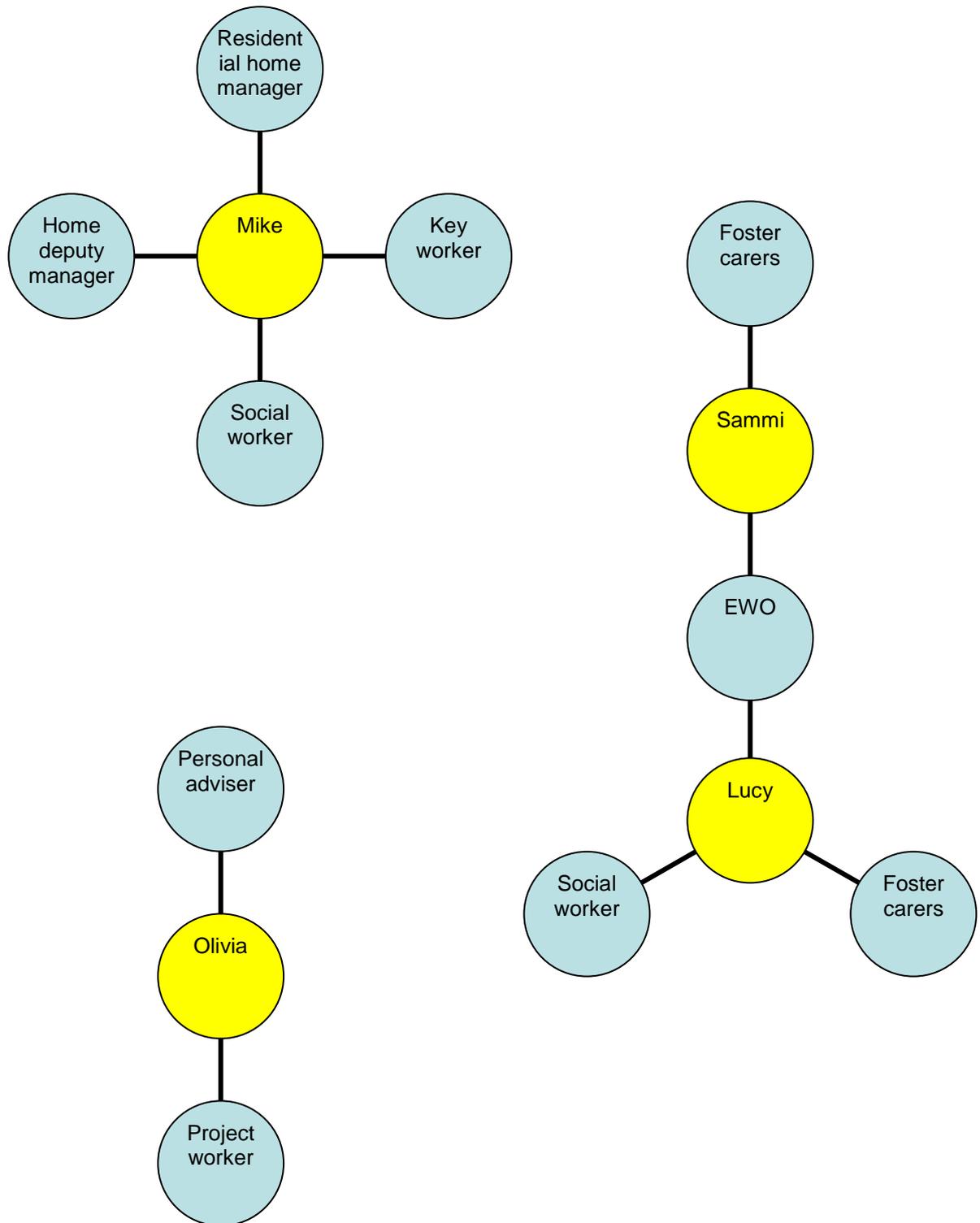
The added layer here was that the adults had previous experiences which coloured their views: this is of course true of any adult involved with young people. As poor outcomes are not uncommon for people from a care background (DfE, 2016a), it was to be expected that adults with experience in this field might have more pessimistic expectations than the young people themselves.

The sample was again opportunistic, relying on the adults whom the young people were happy for me to meet. I obtained the perspectives from adults in

at least two different roles for each case study, and was surprised with how much each adult talked. I met foster carers in their own homes at a time convenient to them, and I visited the residential home during a school day when the members of staff had the time to talk to me. Other interviews were conducted at the offices of the professionals, apart from one interview in a cafe with the project worker. I recorded all the interviews with a digital recorder. There was some overlap of participants, explained in the diagram overleaf. (EWO = Educational Welfare Officer).

After collecting data I maintained contact with the gatekeepers to my research and followed up actions arising from meeting the young people, for example finding work placements at my university. Some months later I sent a summary of my findings so far to the gatekeepers for dissemination to the participants. The summary re-affirmed the need for stability in young people's lives and suggested that more work could be done around exploring aspirations. As well as thanking my participants I gave my contact details to answer any further queries.

Figure 3.1: Adult participants' relationships with care leavers



3.6 Critical discourse analysis

Throughout the data collection phase I strived to maintain ethical reflexivity by keeping a data collection log and maintaining regular contact with my supervisory team to discuss the process. I considered ethical questions such as 'How does one draw the line in using research participants' words and life experiences for one's own purpose as an author? Who benefits, in what ways, and according to what rules of fairness or relations of power?' (Luttrell, 2010, p.9). The data collection phase is not completely separate from analysis, as the researcher has ideas and impressions during and following interviews (Thomas and James, 2006), but I was very concerned about how to provide some framework for analysis to aim for more trustworthiness than was offered by my initial impressions. Some key points seemed clear to me, but might not have seemed relevant to another researcher in a similar position.

I sought to be open about the tentative nature of qualitative research, and how much it is influenced by the individual positionality of the researcher. Thomas and James (2006, p.768) highlight a fundamental challenge facing the qualitative researcher: 'What does one do with one's data? Surely one can't just talk about it'. On one hand, the data cannot be presented without analysis, but on the other, imposing a framework means imposing the researcher's own interpretation, whatever the data said. After reading widely, I adopted critical discourse analysis (CDA) as an approach which could address the issue which emerged in the pilot study: participants do not simply reveal what they consider to be true in interviews, but rather engage in a

range of complex practices. CDA has offered a method of exploring those practices. It is consistent with the theoretical framework adopted, in particular the 'social constructionist insight that language cannot be treated as a technical means by which we articulate our findings. Language itself is value laden' (Cousin, 2010, p.10). CDA has arisen from the work of Foucault, as explored below.

3.6.1 Foucault: power, agency and governmentality

Foucault suggests that power is everywhere, challenging a binary opposition of power versus powerlessness. Foucauldian analysis does not seek a 'true' explanation of how power operates, but seeks rather to destabilise common-sense assumptions about power, such as that it is exerted only by those in positions of authority.

Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth.

Power is employed and exercised (Foucault and Gordon, 1980, p. 98).

This insight illuminates how power is everywhere but at the same time can be hidden. My interpretation of Foucault's theory is that individuals are not helpless puppets mouthing discourses which they do not comprehend, but

rather than all individuals operate within the constraints of discourses which determine the 'conditions of possibility', or the limits of what is thinkable. Therefore, regarding power, individuals 'are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation' (p. 98).

My study aimed to suggest more complex, fragmentary and shifting relations of power than that of adults having power over young people – although that is one of the dimensions at play. CDA can '(r)ediscover the connections, encounters, supports, blockages, plays of forces, strategies and so on which...count...as being self-evident, universal and necessary" (p. 6). This research explored the manifestations of discourse effects to uncover the hidden purposes these serve, disturbing the 'natural' goals which may otherwise seem incontestable.

A focus on power can suggest that individuals do not have agency as they are restrained within a network of power interactions. For Foucault, concepts of individuality are both constraining, in the sense of conditions of possibility, and productive of power. In my analysis, based on Fairclough's model (2003) explained below, discourses at different levels position how people think, feel and behave, although these may feel like personal choices. Furthermore, individuals are perceived by others around them in ways influenced by discourse, and in positions of relative power or powerlessness, and this positioning also imposes constraints. Thus, individuals can exert agency in their thoughts, feelings and behaviours: Foucauldian analysis seeks to

uncover the limitations on agency imposed by discourses which can seem incontrovertible, and also to explore resistance to those limitations.

Power operates at the micro and macro level simultaneously, and Foucault explains in his theory of governmentality how power is maintained and reproduced. The aim of government is not simply to rule through authoritarian enforcement, but 'it is rather a question of arranging things and people always towards their most profitable and productive outcome' (Hook, 2007, p. 226). These benign goals therefore seem unquestionable as power 'exerts a positive influence on life...endeavour[ing] to administer, optimize and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensible regulations' (Foucault and Gordon, 1980, p.137). Through these processes individuals self-govern, monitoring their own behaviour, meaning the individual cannot be separated out from the meta level of government 'because the individual is exactly a resource of government' (Hook, 2007, p.240). As the meta level of government is constructed as arranging affairs for the benefit of individuals, these individuals would be perverse not to follow the given rules, imposing them on themselves and ensuring others also do so.

Foucault further analyses how psychology is key in the classification and normalisation of individual subjects, processes which are crucial to governmentality. This process is not new: as Burman (1991) says individual psychology arose at the turn of the nineteenth century, and since then its influence has extended to social work and to children's services generally. The 'psy sciences' of psychology and psychiatry have transformed political

problems into technical problems which are managed by 'human technologies'. These are 'discrete sets of practicable knowledge and expertise' which 'necessarily entail their own professional vocabularies – discrete languages of codification and control – along with their own regimes of treatment and analysis' (Hook, 2007, p.21). There has been an expansion in caring professions which espouse the aim of working for the benefit of the service user, legitimising judgments and decisions with professional vocabularies based on psychology. Theories drawn from the psychology of child development, such as attachment theory, permeate the professionals' constructions of young people, thereby classifying them whilst making only certain explanations thinkable, and particular limited solutions possible.

3.6.2 Fairclough's framework

Theorists have developed many approaches to discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003, p.2) but the model I have selected is Fairclough's as the different levels provide opportunities to explore contradictions in a system where policy states care leavers must not leave care too early, but this practice persists. Fairclough (2003) proposed a model on three levels for critical discourse analysis in social research:

- social events
- social practices
- social structures

These can also be articulated as texts, orders of discourse, and language. These levels interact in complex ways, with particular interactions (social events) taking up discourses for different purposes, and social practices (orders of discourse) appropriating as well as influencing social structures.

In this study the level of 'social event' corresponds to the interviews and to RQ1: What is the congruence of views amongst adult participants regarding plans for the future of care leavers they work with? This first layer analyses similarities and differences in views expressed about each of the case studies. At the next level, 'social practice' corresponds to analysis of discourses drawn upon by the participants to explain their perspectives (RQ2): How do participants explain why they hold these views? This second level therefore draws together themes across the case studies. The final layer of analysis corresponds to Fairclough's level of 'social structure', using a theoretical framework based on Foucault to analyse how the discourses are enacted and maintained (RQ3): What are the social and political implications of these views? This iterative approach aims to analyse more deeply at each level, while still recalling that social events mediate social networks and social structures, thereby altering them in subtle ways.

For this analysis each interview was examined as a social event or interaction which produced a text, the transcript, as well as my memories of the interaction. Fairclough (2003) proposes that texts create meaning on three different levels: **action**, **representation** and **identification**. For the adult participants, the **action** was to answer interview questions, meaning that they

engaged in a purposeful interaction with a jointly understood goal of completing a satisfactory interview. In the agreed, negotiated interaction of the interview, the participants' responses can be viewed as conscious, active **presentations** of their positions, however limited and transitory. The participants aimed to present a case or argument as to why their views made sense and were persuasive, while simultaneously doing **identity work** (Gee, 2010) on presenting their professional selves. These interwoven layers of meaning are examined in my analysis by attending to the semantic, grammatical and lexical features of the participants' responses.

3.6.3 **Knowledge, power and ethics**

Fairclough presents Foucault's argument for the dialectical relationship between different layers of meaning: 'we have three axes whose specificity and whose interconnections have to be analyzed: the axis of knowledge, the axis of power, the axis of ethics' (Foucault, 1994, p.318 in Fairclough, 2003, p.28). These axes can be used to analyse more closely exactly how individuals take up positions, exert agency, but also submit to power. Humans understand themselves as knowledgeable subjects, who seek to acquire and use knowledge in purposeful ways, both exerting and succumbing to power. They also comprehend themselves as ethical beings who make moral choices.

Three key questions arise which seek to examine the process of subject-constrained-by-discourse: 'How are we constituted as subjects of our own

knowledge? How are we constituted as subjects who exercise or submit to power relations? How are we constituted as moral subjects of our own actions?' (Foucault, 1994, p.318 in Fairclough, 2003, p.28). For Foucault, discourses construct and prescribe the knowledge/power and actions of individual subjects, and this study explores how this operates in the case studies examined. Rose (2000, p,324) highlighted that ethics also serve a purpose, 'binding individuals into shared moral norms and values'.

3.6.4 Ethical reflexivity in the research process

To explain the process of my study, I will return to the five steps of ethical reflexivity proposed by Gewirtz and Cribb (2006).

- First, being explicit, as far as is possible, about the value assumptions and evaluative judgements that inform or are embedded in every stage of our research.

This step, which can be thought of as positioning, can be facilitated by an examination of the data collection log where I recorded my impressions of each interview. However, this should be set in the context of what I thought the data would reveal: when a researcher sets research questions s/he has some idea of what may be discovered (Thomas and James, 2006). I thought that there would be a lack of congruence amongst the adults working with the care leavers, due to the well-documented staff 'churn' (Jackson and Thomas, 1999). For many years researchers have been highlighting the lack of stability amongst adults working with looked after children (e.g. Harker, 2004;

McLeod, 2007), exploring the difficulties caused by changes in personnel in an area of work which relies on relationships. Furthermore, I thought the explanations offered for the views of the key adults would be to do with the inadequacies of the system and the challenges of working with young people. Regarding the implications of these views, I believed they would show a somewhat fatalistic approach to structural problems. These expectations arose from my previous experiences of working with looked after children, but must be measured against the data rather than my prejudices. To overcome this simplistic reading of problems, the data analysis has been repeated with increasing depth of analysis and consideration of alternative explanations.

- Second, being prepared to offer a defence of our assumptions and judgements to the extent that either they might not be shared by others or, conversely, that they are not sufficiently problematised by others.

This step, and the one below, relate to validity as they propose approaches to strengthen the trustworthiness of research. As discussed above, the discourse of 'giving children a voice' (Alderson, 2004) is pervasive and hard to question, but must be problematised as children may say what they think adults want to hear, or make requests which cannot be granted and therefore feel ignored (McLeod, 2007). The fundamental assumption underpinning this research is that the system is failing too many care leavers, which is supported by the evidence: however this study is based on the view that this is due to structural failings, whereas some might pinpoint failings in

individuals instead. In the three chapters of data findings, analysis and interpretation I will offer alternative interpretations.

- Third, acknowledging, and where possible responding to, tensions between the various values that are embedded in our research.

Throughout this research there are two key tensions: firstly between the aim of participatory and emancipatory research with young people, and the recognition that this is idealistic. Secondly, there is tension between the underlying criticism of the system and therefore the professionals who work within it, as outcomes remain poor for care leavers (DfE, 2016a) – and the recognition that the adults do care about the young people they work with and are doing the best they can in difficult circumstances. I moved between these different positions throughout the research process, but wanted to reach a point where I was not overly critical of the adults, due to the constraints discussed in the next point.

- Fourth, taking seriously the practical judgements and dilemmas of the people we are researching.

This step relates to ethics, which is a much wider issue than the pre-data collection process I completed of gaining ethical approval from the university and the local authorities, along with informed consent from the participants, but rather involves recognition of the reality of the lived experiences of the

participants. The care leavers themselves had limited options, as do many young people in the current situation of high youth unemployment and cuts to welfare. These serious problems cannot be resolved by the professionals involved. Furthermore, there are calls for young people to be able to stay in care for longer, but where the professionals echoed these aims, they were still faced with substantial cutbacks in their local authorities' budgets, preventing any investment in longer term care (CPAC, 2015). The adults faced many challenges in addition to financial constraints. For foster carers, the daily test of living with a teenager was combined with other caring responsibilities. Residential care workers had to balance the needs of different young people while following strict guidelines. Social workers and other members of looked after children teams were also constrained by guidelines and high caseloads. It must also be acknowledged that young people can be difficult at times.

- Finally, taking responsibility for the political and ethical implications of our research.

This step also relates to ethics, in the sense of ethical issues arising from the research. The political implications of this research are a critique of the current neoliberal system in British society which requires there to be a supply of disadvantaged youth who will be the losers in the competitive system (Skeggs, 2011). The ethical difficulty here is that I identified this problem without doing anything to help the particular young people in my study.

3.7 Applying Fairclough's model of CDA

This section will explain which aspects of Fairclough's approach to CDA have been helpful in the iterative process of analysing the data. It is important to note here that we

cannot assume that a text in its full actuality can be made transparent through applying the categories of a pre-existing analytical framework. What we are able to see of the actuality of a text depends upon the perspective from which we approach it, including the particular social issues in focus, and the social theory and discourse theory we draw upon (Fairclough, 2003, p.16).

Therefore, although Fairclough has written many texts (for example 1992, 1995, 2003) with detailed guidance on how to undertake CDA, this study draws on the particular aspects which were helpful in analysing and interpreting the data, given my positionality as explained above.

To recap: the Fairclough model used here operates on three levels which correspond to the research questions: social event, social practice and social structure. The first level explores the interviews to uncover what congruence can be found regarding the participants' views of plans for the future of the care leavers in the study. The views of the young people themselves were rather brief, and in three out of the four case studies, uncertain: these are used as a foil to compare the adults' views against as they were not explored

in great depth by the young people themselves. There was also a gap between my meetings with the young people and the phase of interviewing the adults, so close comparisons cannot be made. In the chapter of data findings, the interviews are examined as social constructions by the adults where they did not present a pre-prepared case but rather offered perspectives on the young person they worked with, and their role in ways which unfolded, justifying certain views, and even contradicting themselves.

Fairclough (2003) explains the following terms which were useful in analysing the adults' talk, as they are strategies used by a speaker to present themselves as a reasonable person whose views should be taken seriously. *Recognition work* involves techniques employed to establish the speaker in a particular position, and *repair work* occurs when the speaker feels that their position has been undermined and works to lessen the damage. *Script*, however, is when the speaker seems to follow what others would have already said in that position. These techniques can be summarised as relating to the epistemological position of the speaker, or why they claim to know what they do.

The following terms relate to how much the speaker commits themselves to a viewpoint, as speakers can be tentative about their ontological position: in other words, a speaker can explore positions based on values about which they are unsure, especially when working through dilemmas. *Stake* refers to the extent to which the speaker expresses a belief as their own, or how involved they are in a claim; *footing claim* is when the speaker seeks to

establish some ground for their position, which can be amended by a *footing shift*. These terms will be applied in the data analysis chapter, but the key point to remember here is that the text of the transcript of an interview can be analysed in detail using concepts relating to *modality* and *evaluation*.

Modality 'is what people commit themselves to in what they say or write with respect to truth and with respect to obligation' whereas *evaluation* is 'the values to which people commit themselves' (Fairclough, 2003, p.17). These two aspects are particularly relevant to the research issue, because it concerns adults' ideas about what will happen in the future. These are constructs, to which the participants assign different levels of certainty. The modal verbs associated with the future tense express conviction (will, shall, must), uncertainty (might, may, could, can) and obligation (should, would). Reasons for these judgments about what will happen in the future are supported by the evaluations of the participants. Concentrating on these two aspects of Fairclough's explanation of CDA is a great over-simplification of his detailed and meticulous theory, but it does serve to structure this small-scale study. This approach also overlaps with Foucault's three axes of knowledge, power and ethics. The model is not simply a more and more detailed exploration of themes from the data, but rather offers a way of exploring the contradictions revealed in the data, suggesting that different discourses are mobilised to support shifting positions.

4. Data Findings

The next three chapters use Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis to examine the data in increasing depth. Here, the data findings draw out the similarities and some differences within each case study, identifying key themes which were different for each young person. Next, the chapter of data analysis, linking to Fairclough's level of orders of discourse, examines the dominant discourses which delimit and prescribe the topics which the adults can be knowledgeable about, and to which they ascribe value, while also examining their resistance to these limits. The subsequent chapter of interpretation explores the implications of the dominant discourses and the possibilities of resistance. These steps of findings, analysis and interpretation are viewed through the lens of researcher reflexivity, as knowledge and ethics are constructed through discourse for the participants and for me as the researcher.

4.1 RQ1: What is the congruence of views amongst adult participants regarding plans for the future of care leavers they work with?

This chapter will draw out the similarities and some differences within each case study: Mike, Sammi, Lucy and Olivia. It will begin each case study with a brief pen picture, summarising the young people's own plans for the future, then showing how the adults echoed or contradicted each other in their constructions of the young person they were talking about, using direct

quotes. For each case study, a key problem emerged (two linked problems in the case of Olivia) which were the main focus of the discussions, so these will also be identified with the pen picture. Educational issues were a factor for all of the young people, but were not the main challenge in three of the four cases. This level of analysis corresponds to Fairclough's (2003) level of social event, in his three layer model of critical discourse analysis, with each interview examined as a social interaction. The theoretical lens is that language is constructive, but it is also limited because discourse delimits what it is possible to think or say (Foucault and Gordon, 1980, p.131).

The interviews with adults centre around two different constructions: firstly, presenting me with a convincing picture of the young person, and secondly, explaining to me what adults were doing to support them. There was some congruence in the construction of each young person, with adults echoing the same phrases, but more dissonance in the explanations of adults' roles. I will use the terms 'foster carers', and 'professionals' for the participants involved in working with the young people, not because fostering cannot be professional but for ease in distinguishing the different positions taken up. Linking back to the points in the methodology chapter regarding the focus on how language is used to express what is known and what is valued, what the young people themselves said about their future revealed some of their beliefs about themselves; the adults' perspectives on the young person expressed what they felt they knew about him or her and about the systems they operate within, whereas their explanations of their own roles revealed

more about their values. The figures below give an overview of the sequence of interviews in each local authority.

Figure 4.1: Interviews in Westshire

28/06/12 in council building	12/09/12 in foster carers' homes	4/10/12 in council office	13/11/12 in the residential care home	21/11/12 in social work office	26/11/12 in social work office
Mike			Michelle, manager James, deputy Colin, key worker		Grace, social worker
Sammi	Jean and Adam, foster carers, with Sammi	Leah, EWO			
Lucy	Isma and Jonathan, foster carers			Hilary, social worker	

Figure 4.2: Interviews in Eastshire

18/07/12 council building	15/11/12 cafe	30/11/12 her office
Olivia	Dorothy, project worker	Jane, personal adviser

4.2 Mike

I first met Mike at a social group activity for young people approaching leaving care, when he was fifteen years and nine months old. Although he mixed with

the other young people, he seemed rather more naive than some of the other boys, for example repeating some of the things they said, which irritated his peers. Mike also appeared socially unaware, asking a young woman with learning difficulties about her work:

Don't they do jobs specially for them people?

He is originally from another part of the country but was adopted and moved to the West Midlands. He was taken into care from his adoptive family and had a foster placement breakdown before moving into the residential care home where he had lived for the last three years. Therefore, up until age thirteen Mike had experienced a great deal of churn in his living arrangements and relationships. Mike's plans for his immediate future were contradictory, including going to the local college, gaining employment instead of studying, and moving back to his birth family: all his ideas were vague, as if they were far off in the future instead of in just a few months.

Mike: I'm going back to my family when I move out of care.

Me: When will that be then?

Mike: I dunno, when I am 16, 17, something like that.

This suggested that Mike did not feel he had much understanding of leaving care, which seemed distant to him. Later, when he repeated his wish to move back, I asked about a social network.

Me: Do you know people in Xtown though?

Mike: Well I did, but I've forgotten them. When I go there are random people who say 'hello Mike' and I don't know them.

This suggested that Mike could be in a vulnerable position if he moved back, which was what he said he wanted to do without considering this negative implication.

An exchange between Mike and the other young men seemed to suggest that some of his ideas were copied from others, which they found annoying:

Mike: Well I want to go to college (groans and laughter from others)

Me: Yeah, what do you want to do at college?

Mike: Shut up Ben you're smiling.

Ben: You got something there...

Mike: I want to try and get into Westshire college. I want to do media and gaming.

Harry: Basically he just wants to do what I'm doing.

Mike: I'm doing what I want to do, I want to go to college, you know I like media and gaming (this was said in a pleading voice).

In this case, some of the group demonstrated a rather condescending and belittling attitude towards Mike – not uncommon amongst teenage boys. Mike, however, seemed unprepared in his defence. Conversations such as this provided interesting context for the relationships between peers and the care leavers; highlighting that for all young people, discussion of plans for the future can be entangled with a range of aims, including impressing others or trying to fit in.

Some months later I interviewed three members of staff from Mike's residential home: Michelle, the manager; James, the deputy manager; and

Colin, Mike's key worker. I also interviewed Grace, his social worker. The main problem for Mike was identified as the need for him to move on from his residential care home as he was already older than the age range usually accommodated there, so this change was the main plan for Mike. It can be seen that the chop of having to leave the home was being added to the churn of Mike's earlier experiences. The residential care workers and the social worker were all worried that this would precipitate a change in Mike's life, with him moving back to the area of his birth family. All these adults used the phrase 'he is a lovely lad' repeatedly. While occasionally the phrase did seem to be followed with 'but...', in general their genuine liking for Mike came across. When I asked the key worker what he would change if he had a magic wand he interpreted the question slightly differently from other participants.

Colin: He has a cracking personality...I wouldn't change anything, I like Mike.

He added that it would be good for him if he could be more successful academically. In spite of some of the challenges in working with Mike described below, there appeared to be positive warmth towards him.

4.2.1 Immaturity

There was congruence amongst adults in their descriptions of Mike's immaturity. All four adults echoed the phrase that he 'still hasn't found his own identity', essentialising identity, and assuming that 'finding it' is a key stage in becoming an adult. The position suggested here by the adults was that Mike was still a child but it would be his responsibility to 'find himself' (Colin). The

words of the adults in the interviews constructed Mike as not yet mature, but on an individual journey which would somehow and at some point lead to maturity (equated to 'having' a secure identity), defining an individual process which Mike must work through as 'his identity is still evolving'(Grace).

The construction of Mike as an individual evolving in his own way can be compared with the adults' representation of Mike of being behind his peers in development. The adults used modal verbs ('would put him', 'can fluctuate'), and tempering words ('possibly'), perhaps to lessen the harshness of their judgment of Mike's immaturity:

Grace (social worker): Although Mike is 16, emotionally I would put him at a good few years younger than that because of his experiences. And he is still quite naive.

There is a mixture here of explanation for Mike's immaturity due to previous experiences, and judgment of his character as naïve.

James (deputy manager): Though Mike is 16 chronologically, developmentally Mike can fluctuate down to possibly 12.

All the adults working with Mike said in different ways that he had learning difficulties. He was receiving twenty-five hours of support at school and everyone was hopeful that he would gain some GCSEs due to what was described as excellent provision at school, but there did not seem to be any plans for the support continuing once he left the school he was attending.

Because there was consensus about Mike's immaturity and his learning difficulties, it seemed contradictory that the adults all agreed that he must

move on to more independent living, as determined by the constraints of the system. This was being managed through not discussing it with Mike as it upset him. There were steps being taken to encourage Mike to develop independent skills in cooking and in planning his contact visits.

Grace: It is not the right thing to pursue that at the moment because, you know, he is in his final year of education.

There was an appeal for me to agree with the assertion with the use of 'you know'. The subordination of openness about living arrangements to a concentration on education was picked up by all the adults. The assumptions underpinning these representations of the best course of action were that qualifications are important, and that adults knew what was in Mike's best interests.

4.2.2 Decision-making

There were some contradictions in what adults said for Mike's future. His key worker said he was hopeful that Mike would persist at a job because he liked money, whereas the social worker seemed more concerned about him choosing the right course at college, though she suggested I should talk to an Advice and Support Worker as it was not her area of responsibility.

The three residential care workers were most worried about what would happen if Mike moved back to his birth family as relationships had been inconsistent. A change of location would add to the chop of leaving the home after three years of stability. Michelle suggested that often Mike did not know

his own mind, and that in 'family politics' he followed what his older brother said:

Things that he has talked about being keen on aren't necessarily his own idea, um, his thoughts and his opinions mirror his older brother's, and they mirror other young people's that he has got on well with and had respect for.

All four adults said that it was difficult to know what Mike really thought.

Michelle: Mike has the tendency to sometimes tell Sue (at school) what she wants to hear, to tell me what he thinks I want to hear, and to tell his social worker what he thinks she wants to hear, so that is the difficulty.

Colin: He sort of adopts the personality of the people he is with.

Both James and Grace suggested that 'Mike seems to live in the moment'. In spite of these judgments of Mike's personality and ability, all the adults expected him to take responsibility for making plans, not when he was ready but very soon because of his age. However, significantly, the option he expressly preferred, of continuing to live where he was, was not open to him.

4.2.3 Summary

All the adults working with Mike expressed the view that it was likely he would move back to his birth family's area, although this seemed to be driven more by Mike's older brother wanting to move back rather than by Mike. Michelle voiced concerns 'It all depends whether their Dad wants them there' but also suggested it was Mike's choice. The professionals' presentation of Mike

cohered around his immaturity and concerns about what he would choose to do next, with similar views also being presented of the positive impact of being in care for him. The adults were positive about Mike but worried about his future because they were concerned about decisions he might make. The tension between ensuring young people's welfare while allowing them to make their own plans shows the difference between what adults felt they knew about Mike – that he was immature and had learning difficulties – and the values they enacted as professionals – empowering young people to make their own choices.

4.3 Sammi

I first met Sammi, aged seventeen, at the same social event as Mike, where she seemed popular with members of staff and with all the young people. She was polite and helpful, with an engaging manner, and readily agreed to give me details of her foster carers. Sammi explained to me that she was looking forward to starting an apprenticeship at a nursery close to her foster home, and the plans were all in place to support this. A few months later I interviewed Jean and Adam, Sammi's foster carers at their home, with Sammi also present as they invited her to stay. Some further weeks later I interviewed Leah, her Educational Welfare Officer (EWO), at her office. There was congruence in views adults expressed concerning Sammi, with them agreeing that she was a lovely girl who had worked hard to succeed in gaining the position she wanted, and Sammi herself expressing her satisfaction with her situation. The story was not one of unproblematic success, however. In

my transcript of our meeting, Sammi was very negative about herself, saying fourteen times 'I didn't think I could do it', and positioning herself as someone who needed a great deal of support. This permitted the adults around Sammi to take responsibility for Sammi and to offer help, resolving the dilemma of judging when to take responsibility and when to cede it to the young person, although the adults attended to it by stressing how Sammi was involved in decisions.

4.3.1 Responsibility for success

Sammi located herself in the position of beginning a path to success, contrasting this with her previous life:

I didn't think that I would ever get to here. When I was living with my Mum I didn't really ever go to school so I didn't think about stuff like that. I didn't think I would have an opportunity to get this.

The foster carers presented different positions as they constructed the narrative of how Sammi succeeded in gaining a position on an apprenticeship scheme. At first, Jean stressed the difficulties they faced:

We thought we were failing miserably, didn't we? We tried several different places but we were getting absolutely nowhere.

Sammi supported this negative view with 'I didn't think I would get one', and Adam also stressed the difficulty of finding an apprenticeship:

The apprentice website, we checked that daily, but over the two months that we were using the website there was actually only one that came up that was in a day nursery. We did follow that through. At

the end, well during the course of the summer we tried to work out with Sammi if it was better to go back to college for another year or to take the apprenticeship and we opted for the apprenticeship.

The use of 'we' involved Sammi in the ongoing effort to find an apprenticeship, but was contradicted later in the interview where Jean stressed how hard Adam worked to find the apprenticeship. Adam tempered this by saying 'But Sammi is really the one who has buckled down and done it'. Sammi refused to accept credit:

I think over the five years Adam and Jean have really pushed me and without them you know I couldn't do it.

Sammi continued to stress how her success was not due to her own efforts, saying how nervous she was and 'I am like a little child'. Through the course of the interview Jean seemed to give herself permission to acknowledge the crucial role played by supportive foster carers. She moved away from a description of Sammi's story to a general point about foster care:

I do think sitting here listening to all this that for somebody in care, having the support and not just 'there's a room here for you' but the absolute support from foster carers is huge I think, a big part of it I think, yeah.

To summarise, Sammi maintained a consistent position of saying her success was down to Jean and Adam, whereas they presented contrasting views which placed more emphasis on including Sammi in the decisions made in places, although at times Jean said it was all due to Adam.

Leah, the EWO, said she thought Sammi was resilient, but she presented herself as lacking in confidence, which meant adults stepped into the role of praising her and helping her. (I joined in with saying very positive things to Sammi without realising I was doing so). It can be argued, therefore, that this success story is not in spite of Sammi's lack of confidence, but in a way due to her adoption of this position, as in practice the system operates more smoothly, and adults can adopt their roles more easily, when a child allows adults to take responsibility rather than offering resistance.

Leah admitted that Sammi had not had a stable social worker, demonstrating that churn is a common feature in the lives of looked after children. Leah suggested they had nonetheless been helpful:

I guess if I think about her social workers, she has had a lot of changes but she has had social workers who are really on the ball and have sorted out things like contact which can be troublesome for young people.

The last clause served to establish Leah as an experienced professional, a strategy repeated here:

I think another thing, perhaps having seen some other young people where it does not work so well, Sammi's foster carers have worked extremely well with the foster carers for Sammi's brothers.

After emphasising the importance of social workers' efforts, Leah seemed to suggest that the foster carers' efforts were 'natural':

And Sammi's brothers have also done incredibly well, are also in a very settled placement and the two sets of foster carers do quite a lot together quite naturally to facilitate the contact between them.

The 'quite naturally' seems to lessen the significance of Jean and Adam's efforts.

Sammi's view of her social workers confirmed the churn, but otherwise was very different:

Well I have had loads of social workers, I don't know, and I would like to strangle every single one of them – seriously.

This strong opinion was in sharp contrast to Sammi's generally gentle way of speaking. Jean sought to moderate Sammi's view with:

It is very difficult to build a relationship with social workers because they were sort of in and out of her life which was a real shame.

This instability was contrasted with the long-term plans Jean, Adam and Sammi discussed, including a future family wedding, and Sammi's overall life plans.

Sammi also gave an insight into how she disliked that professionals treated her differently because she was looked after, and said five times that her teachers and fellow pupils 'don't understand about being in care'. She described using strategies such as calling her foster carers 'Mum and Dad' to avoid having to explain why she used their first names. Sammi did not like being stigmatised by occurrences like PEP meetings taking place during

lessons so that she had to leave and face awkward questions when she returned:

Yeah everyone would be working and then they would all look and turn round – it was horrible. Especially where it was, everyone would go past and look in the window, I would be like – just go away. It was horrible I hated it.

Sammi gave a vivid description of a school trip which finished early, and where her peers were allowed to go into town but she was not and had to wait with an adult to be collected and taken home:

with someone next to me like an escort... I was with my friend and I was going to go with her and her Mum, I've been to her house a couple of times but I wasn't allowed to go anywhere, it was just a nightmare... It's not fair, they were still treating me differently, waiting for me to get picked up... I think they just don't know enough about children in care.

4.3.2 Summary

There was congruence between the views of Sammi herself and the key adults interviewed as to the positive path she was following and settled plans for the future. The reasons for this success were constructed in different ways at different points in the interviews, with the EWO stressing the importance of professional interventions while the foster carers sought to keep the balance between giving Sammi credit and showing how they were active in supporting her. The churn in social workers was presented differently by Leah, who

suggested this had not been a problem, to Sammi and Jean, who proposed that social workers had not been helpful. The foster carers presented themselves as advocates for Sammi, taking her views into account whilst acting on her behalf. Sammi could imagine her future into the long term so that, when I asked where she saw herself at age twenty-five, she said 'I would hopefully sort of have my own flat, have a job, a good stable job, a car, just carry on with that and hopefully find someone that I could get married to. I'd want to have a job first and then get married – it's like a little fairy tale'. She continued by saying that she would like to continue to live in the same area as it was safe for children, demonstrating how settled she felt. Sammi forcefully expressed the view that she did not like being treated differently because of her looked after status.

4.4 Lucy

I met Lucy (15) at the same social group activity as Mike and Sammi, although she was the youngest there and seemed rather shy. She was happy to stay back to talk to me one-to-one, however, to tell me how well she was doing at school and about her ambitious plans for the future. Lucy spoke with confidence about her academic aspirations: 'the grades I am getting at the moment will easily get me into sixth form. The place where I am I can only take 6 GCSEs but I'm predicted to do quite well in them'. When I asked Lucy what helped her to make plans for the future she replied 'It's just been myself and the bad people in my life because, yeah, I don't want things to be like that'. The idea that negative experiences can make an individual more

determined to succeed can be linked to Cameron's concept of self-reliance (2007), and contrasts with the professional focus on the damaging effects of trauma (Bebbington, 2005). Lucy said at first that she wanted to go to university and be a social worker; then she contradicted this by saying that she wanted to travel for a few years when she left sixth form; then again that she wanted to join the RAF when she finished school. I responded positively to Lucy's plans so she did not suggest alternatives because she felt she was being criticised: rather, she seemed equally enthusiastic about each option presented within the space of a few minutes.

Some months later I interviewed Isma and Jonathan, Lucy's foster carers; then Hilary, her social worker; and Leah, her EWO. The consensus of the adults, apart from Hilary, was that Lucy was rather challenging and difficult to work with, but all the adults agreed that she had great potential and should go to university. The main issue the foster carers identified for Lucy was her placement in a segregated unit for education rather than mainstream school, and the effect this would have on her future progress.

4.4.1 Foster carers' concerns about access to educational qualifications

Jonathan led the discussion about Lucy but worked hard to marshal Isma's support for his points: they often finished each other's sentences, seeking to reinforce each other in their concerns. After a brief preamble they identified their main worry:

Jonathan: She is not in mainstream, she's at the Orchard, about...10 people there?

Isma: Less than that, yeah.

Jonathan: Our belief is, I might be right or wrong here, they are giving her false – what's the correct word?

Isma: False hope.

This tentative expression of their view, searching for the correct term, was then followed by a lengthy explanation of the reasons for their concerns, and can be interpreted in different ways. Firstly, Isma and Jonathan could have been testing me, in case I was on the side of the 'professionals' and their decisions, rather than with the foster carers. As I said it was 'worrying' they were satisfied that I was amenable to their view and continued to give many examples of why they were dissatisfied with Lucy's placement, with their sentences tumbling over each other to build their argument.

Secondly, this can be read as Jonathan avoiding over-stating his case to begin with, even though he and Isma both felt strongly about it, because it was important to him that I understand this issue. My agreement that their position was understandable prompted Jonathan to consider the situation in a new light:

They should be getting her in mainstream one or two days a week just to deal with big school things, but then I think, thinking about it while I am chatting about it now, she would realise that her education is nothing like the education that those other year 11s are getting.

It may be the interview did not merely involve the revelation of the participants' thoughts to the researcher, but gave the foster carers the opportunity to construct and present new reflections on their situation. As detailed below, Isma and Jonathan often felt at odds with the professionals with whom they work, so an interview with a sympathetic outsider allowed them to talk through possible explanations for Lucy's current situation, and to discuss concerns and frustrations without feeling they were being judged. This corresponds with Fairclough's concept of social acts creating meaning (2003), as language is constructive.

Isma and Jonathan both expressed the view that Lucy's options were being limited by her placement in segregated provision but that their concerns were not being taken seriously. They explained how they kept raising their concerns:

Jonathan: We've said to social workers that they need to start interacting her now – we've always said it, haven't we?

Here he was locating the blame with social workers for not listening when Isma and Jonathan had identified a problem. The EWO's hedging, after stating that Lucy was very able academically, suggested that the foster carers' concerns were well-founded:

Leah: Yes in an ideal world Lucy can get those higher grades but we have to be realistic. To support Lucy as best we can not to be disappointed.

Jonathan used the expression 'right or wrong' five times, and said three times that he had no education, but he also resisted being positioned as somehow inferior non-professionals. He explicitly expressed that foster carers are the most important people in the life of a looked after child:

You've got to realise that they are 9 to 5. Where have they been when it is 2 o'clock in the morning and you are sitting at the top of the stairs?

Where have they been when it has all gone AWOL?

The resistance was also enacted through the very practical metaphors which Jonathan used throughout, comparing their immersion in Lucy's life to what social workers do:

They work 9 to 5, no disrespect, but we work on that different level. We had to pull those reins in tight, I mean she got a right firm talking-to off me, took it on the chin didn't she? She just needs to be told very firm voice, and that is how we did it. I said if you carry on down that path you will lose your future.

Jonathan also repeated the phrase 'picking up the pieces' and his commitment to treating Lucy the same as his own children, which he expressed vividly:

Just because they have got foster child, 'fc' on their head, they should be treated exactly the same. I am very powerful on it. I am passionate about it.

He was speaking heatedly, perhaps distancing himself from how he felt professionals wanted him to behave as someone who followed the guidance.

He said that courses do not really help because:

You have to find your own devices with each child.

This recognition of the uniqueness of each child and every relationship suggests an approach where Lucy's future would be worked through and taken step-by-step. For these foster carers, the involvement of professionals seemed to be problematic.

4.4.2 Multi-agency teams

Isma and Jonathan were both critical of a system which involved many adults working with one child, whereas Leah stressed multi-professional working as the main strength of the system she works in:

Jonathan: With looked after children there are so many different doors... we have to go through all these procedures.

Isma: You have to go through the social worker and then the educational psychologist...

Jonathan: But if I'm right or wrong that's Chinese whispers, by the time these have gone it's either been exaggerated, or thinned out, one or the other.

The couple supported each other and resisted the attempts they felt were made to exclude them or ignore their views, stating that they knew Lucy best. Possibly because of the long discussion we had about the impact of Lucy's placement, Jonathan said several times throughout the interview that Isma was going to ring Leah, the EWO, to discuss the matter. Isma and Jonathan

were trying to resolve the tension between the daily challenge of caring for Lucy and being managed from a distance by the looked after children team.

4.4.3 Disruption

The EWO, Leah, and social worker, Hilary, both used the term 'chaotic' to describe Lucy, whereas her foster carers described her as having 'a lot in her head'. The EWO was critical of Lucy, saying:

Things are quite chaotic with Lucy, you can feel that there are periods of time when things are starting to be a little bit settled and then almost – throws something else in.

Lucy was thus positioned as a troublemaker because she did not allow things to be 'settled', but there were differences in the adults' interpretations of how Lucy expressed her wishes. The social worker was positive, stating:

She has got quite clear goals, in many ways she is a young person who is easy to work with because she is quite motivated, knows what she wants.

It is noteworthy that Hilary had been Lucy's social worker for only a short time, and this description did not match my experience of talking to Lucy. The EWO had known Lucy for more than 3 years and positioned her as being difficult, explaining that at her previous school Lucy made 'very regular allegations of bullying' of which the school could find no evidence, so 'still she felt nobody listened'. As Lucy moved school matters were not resolved, and the overall conclusion was that Lucy was more of a troublemaker than a victim. This negative view of Lucy as being hard to work with was carried into predictions

for the future by Leah, the EWO, when talking about Lucy moving on from the tuition centre she attends:

The transition is going to be difficult. There is going to be support, and Lucy will be resistant to that support.

These changes of school are evidence of churn in Lucy's life, and her foster carers were worried about the long-term impact of the chop with the move to segregated provision.

Lucy's foster carers echoed what Leah stated about Lucy 'having opinions', but focused more on how they interacted with her, and on the reasons for her approach. Jonathan said:

She's very opinionated, very argumentative, we're just trying to structure that, saying other people have views as well, your view won't always be the same as others. (...) Really she is a young lady who is hiding behind a mask. She is very vocal, but ask why. She has never been listened to before.

This view was of a young woman keen to voice her opinions (this was not how she appeared to me when I met her with a group of young people, where she was the youngest), but this characteristic was presented as a positive by her social worker, a negative by the EWO, and something to work on by her foster carers.

4.4.4 The role of the system

While presenting a very child-centred approach, Lucy's foster carers accepted that they were working within a system, although they complained about its hierarchical nature, saying for example, what the system needs is to listen to the foster carers.

Lucy's social worker Hilary was quite open about the limitations of the system, saying:

It's often a bit of pot luck when we put children (...) often we make placements in quite a hurry if it is an emergency so we don't have time to compare everything on paper, and often if you do it doesn't work.

This last phrase seemed to undermine the role of social workers but was employed to justify her performance within a system where there are not enough foster carers so children are placed wherever can be found.

Throughout her interview Leah, the EWO, stressed the important role of professionals and justified decisions to move Lucy out of mainstream schooling into specialist provision:

School felt, we felt, the carers felt, that that more nurturing environment would suit her better.

Here Leah was marshalling consensus from different perspectives, and using anonymous agents through 'school felt', to disperse responsibility. The fact that Lucy was ambitious about her future, wanting to achieve good grades in her GCSEs, then to go on to sixth form college and university, could be seen

as a positive approach. For Lucy, however, this seemed to clash with views of what is acceptable behaviour for a girl in her position. As an example of difficult behaviour Leah said:

If she isn't achieving what she thinks she should be achieving, she blames the teachers.

This might be the reaction of many parents faced with 'underachieving children', but was not deemed acceptable from Lucy. Leah was firmly on the side of the professionals here. Lucy was described as trying 'to play people off against each other'; displaying 'divisive behaviour' and 'always needing to pull people in and creating a crisis'. Making demands and complaints was not constructed as being an acceptable response to what was on offer, and although Lucy's foster carers expressed grave concerns about the education she was receiving, these concerns were not being acted upon. Hilary, the social worker, did not think that Lucy's educational placement would be a problem in the future.

4.4.5 Summary

There was congruence across the perspectives on Lucy's academic potential to attend university, and on her character, offered by the adults, describing some of the challenges she presented, but there was a lack of consistency in their expectations for the future. The foster carers' main concern was that Lucy's placement in a segregated unit would prevent her from being able to pursue her plans to progress to A-levels and university. On the other hand, the EWO presented the argument that Lucy had to be removed from

mainstream school, and she should not expect too much from her qualifications.

The social worker foresaw no problem with Lucy being able to succeed in going to university. This shows that although aspirations for Lucy were the same, in thinking that she should go on to higher education, expectations were at odds, in particular with Isma and Jonathan worrying she would not be able to progress as she wished. The contrasting view expressed by Lucy's social worker may be because she had only worked with Lucy for a few months. There was clear disagreement about Lucy's educational placement, which Leah described as unavoidable, Hilary viewed as unproblematic, and Isma and Jonathan suggested was ruining Lucy's prospects.

4.5 Olivia

I met 17-year-old Olivia on a course preparing care leavers for work placements at a different local authority. The overall mood of the small group of four young people was a little confrontational, but Olivia was prepared to volunteer information openly. She described herself in ways which seemed to chime with the aims of the course she was on, saying 'I need to boost up my confidence skills.' When I asked about her aspirations, Olivia began by stating that she was not sure of what career path to take:

I don't really know what I want to do yet but I am starting a course for nursery, that's a 10 week course but I just want to try that out and if I don't really want to do that then I want to

go into singing, that kind of thing, but I don't know, I don't really want to go to college.

When I asked if she had experience of working with young children she replied: 'no like when I was in school, because I was a big fan of PE, the teacher got me to help out with PE and that so we did sports days, we worked with them, I love children, I work with my nieces and nephews'. These rather limited experiences led to Olivia being put on a path towards nursery work as the only option, despite her reservations. Olivia suggested some personality traits which were holding her back, being 'talkative, easily distracted, following rules...laziness' and explaining that she did not like going to new places as 'I feel like small when I am going them places.' Olivia played the part of being a participant on the course who could recognise weaknesses as a first step to overcoming them, and who had a tentative goal in mind: working with children.

Some months later I interviewed Dorothy, a project worker who ran the course on routes to employment for care leavers which Olivia attended, and Jane, Olivia's personal adviser (PA). The role of the PA is to support care leavers. The main plans for Olivia were firstly, moving out of the residential care home where she lived, and secondly, taking up work experience opportunities before deciding a career path.

Dorothy explained that it had been the third attempt to persuade Olivia to do the course which prepared young people for work experience, but that Olivia had 'astounded everybody' by making a real success of it:

She was a real valued member of the group actually, she was a real bubbly social member which I think came as a shock actually to her PA and social worker.

Dorothy suggested that young people can be misjudged by adults who work with them, so it is important to keep an open mind. Jane said:

Olivia has got potential, she is a bright girl, I think Olivia could really, really succeed.

The adults agreed that Olivia had talents which could help her in the future, but also that she might make choices that would hinder her.

4.5.1 Living arrangements

There were contradictions in Dorothy's discussion of where Olivia wanted to live. At first she stated that Olivia wanted to move out of the area to a nearby town where her birth mother lived, and therefore:

Part of her thinking for not engaging with the work placement was so social services would not have a reason to house her here and keep her here.

This explanation suggested that it was not really anyone's fault that Olivia had not 'engaged' with the work placements, it was because of wider issues. At other points, however, Dorothy stated that Olivia wanted to stay where she

was (in a residential unit) and also that she wanted to go into independent living. It may well be that Olivia expressed these contradictory views, but it is also clear that Dorothy was not involved in decisions about where young people live because of her role, so only had a vague idea of what is available:

I imagine that there is, sort of a housing association, you know, that perhaps own the property that she has got the tenancy for.

Dorothy suggested that decisions about where to live impacted on Olivia's ability to 'engage' but also made it clear that she was not involved in any of those decisions, demonstrating the segmentation of care leavers' lives. The division of tasks between different sections of children's services leads to churn in young people's lives as they are moved on from one team to another.

A key reason for the concern about where Olivia was to live was that she had been 'AWOL from the residential unit a lot of the time.' Dorothy chose her words carefully to describe the behaviour Olivia was showing at the unit:

There are real concerns around her be – the man – the management of her behaviour.

This is consonant with professional discourses about behaviour management (Bebbington, 2005). When describing a decision which could be looked at critically, moving Olivia out of a residential unit when she did not want to go, Dorothy used the passive form:

I think there has been a decision made...the placement has to stop, something has to change.

No-one was identified as making that decision and it was solidified with the explanation that:

At this age she wouldn't be considered to go into foster care so that is the route, the only option.

The chop of having to move on from where she was living was presented as inevitable.

4.5.2 Resistance

Olivia resisted by not accepting what was offered. Dorothy, the project worker, described her as 'very difficult', 'quite obstructive', 'doing what she likes', adding 'she gets her own way'. She repeated the phrase 'very much calling the shots' as for Olivia 'It has to be on her terms'. This description of Olivia can be related to Cameron's (2007) concept of looked after children developing self-reliance as a necessity, but this behaviour being viewed negatively by adults. Dorothy used psychological terms to explain why Olivia's situation was unsatisfactory:

She's not making progress, she's treading water there, in some ways regressing because some of her behaviour is quite juvenile, some of her avoidance tactics.

Dorothy's use of 'some' moderates the harshness of the criticism of Olivia for not progressing as required.

The pattern of describing behaviour as challenging, giving psychological explanations for this, and then accepting that there was only one possible next step for Olivia, was also followed by Jane, the personal adviser. Jane stressed repeatedly that Olivia's problem was that she 'chooses not to

engage', giving the explanation that this was because of fear and lack of confidence, and picking up on a phrase Dorothy used:

If she stayed in residential she would go backwards, she would regress.

The modal verbs used here express Jane's certainty of the negative consequences of Olivia not moving, when there can be no certainty. Jane emphasised the support Olivia would need and would continue to receive in developing independence skills. Using the depersonalised term 'the local authority' is 'a resource to obfuscate agency and responsibility' (Fairclough, 2003, p.220) employed in Jane's explanation of why Olivia must move, where she stated that:

The local authority are acknowledging that these young people need to be out of residential at seventeen-and-a-half for the best outcomes.

The use of 'need' expresses both certainty about the consequences of plans, and judgment of what is best.

In spite of Olivia's suggestion that she wanted to work with children, she had not attended work placements set up by Dorothy: two at the same nursery, and one at a primary school. Dorothy slipped into using the language of reports when she talked about these events, terming it 'placement sourced' and 'failed to attend' rather than 'Olivia did not go' which contrasted with the much warmer way she spoke about Olivia's success on the course.

4.5.3 Lack of engagement

When talking about the way Olivia had not followed up work placement opportunities Dorothy began to use the term 'engage,' for example in 'she has not engaged in anything' and 'she is not doing any of her independence plan, she's not engaging.' Dorothy's views of Olivia's situation were congruent with the views of her personal adviser, Jane, who discussed at length the disappointment of Olivia not taking up the work placements:

Staff at the residential tried to get Olivia to engage, tried to talk, but Olivia's lack of engagement is a problem really with professionals.

Two key themes of Jane's interview can be identified here. Firstly, Jane used the term 'as professionals' repeatedly, locating herself as one amongst many professionals. This could be a form of self-preservation as Jane described a very trying relationship where Olivia tried to avoid her at all costs, but where Jane had to keep trying to work with her:

I don't know how many times I've been to see Olivia, but you have to keep going.

Secondly, in the part of the interview where Jane talked about Olivia's current situation she used the term 'engage' or 'engagement' fourteen times, locating the blame for Olivia's 'failure to progress' in her lack of engagement.

Jane offered the reason for Olivia's behaviour as her wish to stay in the residential unit and 'she sees it as we are the people who want to talk about moving on to supported lodgings...she sees it that if she doesn't engage it won't happen.' It could be suggested that 'engaging' is synonymous with

accepting what is offered, which Olivia resisted. Jane suggested that higher powers had set the rules which meant Olivia had to move out of residential care before they are 18 years old. I asked directly if Olivia would be forced to move and Jane answered:

I know it sounds awful but I wouldn't use that word. (...) We are hoping that when she moves we will see a change in her becoming more independent, wanting to do things and hopefully that will be the turning-point where she will engage.

This can be seen as the chop of moving from the residential unit forcing Olivia to 'engage', even if that would arise because she finds things very difficult.

4.5.4 Summary

The two professionals working with Olivia agreed on her potential, but could see that her situation was likely to deteriorate, with a risk of social exclusion. This was ascribed to 'lack of engagement' and also to concerns about Olivia's living arrangements, where she was described as having too much control. This situation is very far from the stated aims of policy documents to give young people a voice and to afford them choices. Olivia had made her views very clear but she would nonetheless be forced to move out of the residential unit and to follow plans made by other people.

The term 'engage' is used in two different ways: as described above, to suggest that Olivia should accept what is offered with the work placements; but also that the shock of moving out to supported lodgings may make her

'engage', which can be read as putting her in a situation where she would have to ask for help. Jane said that Olivia's family relationships were 'volatile' and also that she did not have many friends. Speaking about her years of experience, Jane said:

Lots of these young people, they haven't got anyone else, so you can be a key figure in their life even though you're not seeing them week in, you're there in the background.

This mobilised the script of professionals being the experts who work with many young people, blurring Olivia's situation with that of others.

4.6 Conclusion to data findings: levels of congruence

The strength of the data from the young people is that it gives insight into their unique lived experiences in their own words, for example with Sammi being made to feel that she was a prisoner being escorted. One limitation is that the problems expressed by these care leavers have been documented before, demonstrating the ongoing difficulty of resolving tensions such as that between freedom and safeguarding. Another limitation is that, where young people expressed contradictory views, or seemed to be pursuing different goals (such as Mike fitting in with the other young men) there was not time or a strong enough relationship to explore these in more depth. In situations characterised by ongoing churn, such as Sammi having six social workers in five years, this problem may be replicated. Overall, data from the young people in the case studies is too fragmented to draw out any major conclusions, but gives tantalising insights which could be followed up in further research. The limitations of the research design and my own personal

time and access resources prevented that from happening in this project, but a more participatory approach might satisfy this in future work.

To recap the data collected from the adult participants, each cluster for the four case studies provided a picture of the young person and the main problem they faced. There were shared views of characters and of their challenging situations, as summarised in the table below, which can be viewed as co-constructions by the adults, as viewed from my standpoint.

Figure 4.3: Summary of congruent views for each case study

Young person	Adults	Character	Main problem
Mike	Social worker, three from residential care home (manager, deputy manager, key worker)	Lovely lad, immature, with learning difficulties	Does not want to leave residential care home but needs to make decisions about the future
Sammi	Foster carers, EWO	Lovely girl	Lacks confidence in herself, saying her foster carers are responsible for her success
Lucy	Foster carers, EWO, social worker	Difficult girl, causing disruption (except from social worker)	Ensuring she can gain the qualifications she needs
Olivia	Project worker, personal adviser	Difficult girl, resisting help	Does not want to leave residential care home Lack of engagement

The interviews with the four foster carers tended to maintain a consistent tone, with a focus on the young person throughout, and some frustration with professionals. In contrast, most of the interviews with the eight professionals tended to follow a pattern of beginning with the use of professional terms;

followed by a more personal and emotional section discussing the young person's life to date; and ending with a shift back into professional discourse when discussing the future for the young person. It is noteworthy that the two professional men I interviewed did not follow this pattern. The deputy manager of Mike's residential care home presented himself as a professional throughout with his consistent use of 'we' or 'Westhome', thereby avoiding using 'I', and in his discussion of standards and inspections; while Colin, Mike's key worker, was practical throughout, focusing on life skills such as budgeting and cooking.

There was in general a great deal of congruence amongst professionals' views of the young people they worked with, although this was not true in Lucy's case, perhaps because Hilary had only been her social worker for a few months. It is nonetheless disappointing that a breakdown in communication can occur where, from the point of view of Lucy's social worker, the foster carers were 'doing a fantastic job', whereas from their point of view they were ignored. This seems to point to a more general problem, which is that those the young people live with have to deal with situations on a daily basis, but their perception is that social workers have control. In the case of Mike and Olivia (and to a lesser extent Lucy) it is worrying that everyone could agree that the situation had every chance of deteriorating but there seemed few opportunities to prevent this happening.

5. Data analysis

5.1 RQ2: How do participants explain why they hold these views?

The data findings chapter focused on congruence within each case study, whereas this chapter will focus on drawing out themes across the case studies. In Fairclough's model (2003), this layer relates to orders of discourse, or social practices. The analysis will use ideas from Foucault to draw out the discourses mobilised by the adult participants in justifying the views they presented, to explore their involvement in systems characterised by chop and churn. I begin by exploring the strategies used by participants across the case studies in recognition work, with the foster carers focusing more on being responsible, caring parents whereas other professionals concentrated more on 'human technologies' (Hook, 2007). The concepts used, taken from Fairclough's model of CDA are summarised overleaf.

Figure 5.1: Summary of Fairclough's CDA terms

Knowledge/ethics	CDA term	Explanation	Example
Epistemology/ modality/ knowledge	Recognition work	Establishing yourself in a particular role	As professionals
	Repair work	Addressing any weaknesses which appear in the role	The strength of how we work...We stay consistent in their lives
	Script	Following what has been said previously	We've always said it, haven't we?
Ontology/ evaluation/ ethics	Stake	Presenting something you value	They should be treated exactly the same. I am very powerful on it
	Footing claim	Establishing your own position	We are a dedicated and committed team
	Footing shift	Adjusting your own position	Why not extend it – that's the only thing for me. But there are lots of other people whose children leave at 16, 17, 18

5.2 Recognition work

Gee (2010, p.35) defines a key purpose of Discourse in establishing or maintaining a situated identity engaged in situated practice.

The key to Discourses is 'recognition'. If you put language, action, interaction, values, beliefs, symbols, objects, tools,

and places together in such a way that others recognize you as a particular type of *who* (identity) engaged in a particular type of *what* (activity), here and now, then you have pulled off a Discourse (and thereby continued it through history, if only for a while longer). (Emphasis in original)

The interviews with adults can be analysed as 'recognition work', where the professionals presented themselves as experienced experts, relating to me, the interviewer, as a researcher into their area of expertise, whereas the foster carers presented themselves as caring parents, relating to me as a mother. I did not set out to talk about my children but in our discussions I made it clear that I knew about, for example, the pressure of studying many subjects at GCSE level, unconsciously in an effort to establish rapport with the participants.

Recognition work was negotiated in different ways by the two sets of foster carers, suggesting that these roles are locally negotiated and maintained. Jean and Adam presented themselves as the adults who were really in charge of what happened in Sammi's life, with other professionals only being called upon when required, so the recognition work they engaged in was to present their competence whilst seeking to avoid a position of dominance over Sammi. Thus, they presented the actions they took but also drew in how Sammi was consulted. Their interviews began with the main topic the foster carers wanted to focus on, which was Sammi's success story. Jean

explained how she and Adam worked with Sammi to ensure she was given academic support:

I mean at one point we thought Sammi would get more help and support if she was statemented and we felt when she first came to us that that was a real – a real possibility that she would get statemented because you know things were quite bad. She wasn't, they said that she didn't need to be statemented, but we thought that she might get extra help, but we learnt quite quickly that she wouldn't accept the extra tuition within the school which is why we said, 'right, if you won't accept it within the school we'll arrange it outside it', which is where the looked after children education team came in and helped. It was great, it did work, but it didn't work within school.

Here Jean took up the discourse of special educational needs, where the deficit is in the young person, rather than focusing on barriers such as having missed parts of the curriculum, which Berridge (2009) warns against. Jean negotiated different positions in relation to who managed the process of providing extra support for Sammi, suggesting at first that she and Adam were driving the quest for support, but then ceding control to the 'they' who determined that Sammi did not 'need to be statemented'. Next, Sammi was given autonomy in refusing to accept extra support at school, but then Jean used a direct quote to stress the agency she and Adam had in requesting extra help outside school.

The looked after children education team were positioned as providing a service requested by Jean and Adam to meet Sammi's needs and wishes. Jean presented herself and her husband as caring, responsible parents, taking into account Sammi's views and using the services offered by the LA. This can be contrasted with how Leah spoke at length about summer schools attended by Sammi, stressing how helpful they had been, although these were not mentioned by Sammi, Jean or Adam.

Isma and Jonathan presented a different picture of being ignored or undermined by the professionals, when they felt that they were the adults who were taking on the important role of caring for Lucy every day. The problem of her educational placement demonstrated that the professionals made decisions about Lucy's life which were beyond her foster carers' control, but they then had to try to solve any problems it caused.

Schofield *et al.* (2013) suggest that foster carers can experience tension between the roles of being professional carers and loving parents, although it is possible to combine these successfully so that both roles are enriched rather than undermined. The recognition work performed by the foster carers in this study, however, suggested that they concentrated as presenting themselves as parents providing a loving family home, rather than as professionals working in a team.

Although I began the interviews of all the adults with an informal question ('how long have you known the young person?'), the professionals sought to

establish themselves as professionals by defining their role. Colin said 'I've taken over as Mike's key worker'; Grace said 'I was case manager since he was taken into care in November 2009 under section 20'; Hilary said of Lucy 'I became her case manager only in about May or June'; James said 'Three and a half years because we do support work with families'; and Leah said 'as the EWO on the team'.

This emphasis on the role they had in relation to a young person changed the focus somewhat from knowing a young person to having been allocated them as a task. Professionals tended to use 'we' in describing their relationship with a young person, suggesting a professional team rather than a one-to-one relationship. James (deputy manager of the residential home) in particular rarely used 'I'. This was further supported by the repeated strategy of mentioning the names of other professionals and their roles, stressing the positives of their work. For example, James said of Mike:

He has got his last core group with his looked after children social worker and then Mike has already been allocated his 16+ social worker, her name is Fiona Brown, she is also his brother's social worker, older brother, so she is going to have a good history of the family.

Another example of recognition work by the professionals was in relating the individual young person's experiences to the experiences of children in care in general in the sort of professional talk which suggests years of experience.

The script of experts working with looked after children, having seen situations

many times before, was identified earlier in the data analysis as a way of diluting individual young people's problems, but also here served the dual purpose of framing adults as experienced professionals.

Grace (social worker) said:

I think for our children they feel safe in the present.

When talking about support which is offered, Michelle (residential home manager) asked:

If they don't engage, you know, if you offer and they don't engage then what can you do really?

Colin (key worker) stated:

What you find with kids in care is that they get so much done for them that you might forget about the little things that you do with your own kids. And you've got to bring it back to reality.

Interestingly, the three workers at the residential home all compared the lives of their own children with the lives of looked after children, with an emphasis on the entitlements and support provided in the care system, described as being more than their own children could hope for. There was a slight note of resentment about financial arrangements for the young people staying at the residential home, for example about them automatically receiving new trainers when parents might have to think about such a purchase (James). These comments were framed as moral judgments, for example in Colin's implied criticism above that looked after children 'get so much done for them', which links to the earlier discussion of responsibility for success.

Professionals also used acronyms relating to areas of children's services, such as 'CAMHS workers', where CAMHS stands for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, as part of recognition work to position themselves as professionals in this area, being interviewed by someone who also understands this area. With Grace (social worker) I had to ask for clarification of some terms, e.g. 'section 47 investigations', but most of the professionals used terminology such as 'attachment difficulties', 'nurture', 'therapeutic' and 'resilience' with confidence, assuming I would understand the point they were making (Leah, Jane, Grace, Hilary, Michelle and James).

When we moved on to discussing the future for the young person the professionals tended to drift back into more professional discourse. This was evidenced by their use of what Skeggs (2005) calls 'therapy speak'. For examples, terms such as 'attachment behaviours' and 'resilience' were repeated throughout these sections of the interviews.

The significance of these pervasive vocabularies, which provide repertoires of trauma, stress, attitude, intelligence, self-esteem, fulfilment and self-realization, is that they are always ethical scenarios with maxims and techniques of self-conduct... It is up to the individual to 'choose' their repertoire of the self (Skeggs, 2005, p.973).

In addition to the commonalities in content across the professionals, drawing on 'therapy speak' (Skeggs, 2005), there were also similarities particularly when explaining to me how some difficult decisions were taken. At these points professionals drew on the use of the passive voice, such as 'it was felt', and shifted responsibility by allocating different tasks to different individuals.

Here Foucault's three axes of knowledge, power and ethics can be used to examine how professionals are constrained by discourses which limit what can be offered to care leavers. The expert knowledge which supports professional decisions is psychological knowledge (Burman, 2008b): this is not to say that the effect of trauma, for example, should be ignored, but rather to suggest that the dominance of individualising and deficit-based concepts of young people limits the possibilities which can be offered, or even thought of.

Adults do have power over young people's lives, but it is constrained by the system within which they work, and as it is dispersed across different parts of the system responsibility is also dispersed. Governmentality operates through the amalgamation of actions following rules, relying on the accepted ethicality of decisions made in accordance with these rules. Thus, it is not the case that professionals seek poor outcomes for young people, or do not care about what happens to them. Instead, as ethical professionals, drawing on their expert knowledge, they can only make the decisions which are possible within the system.

Moral judgments were made about the actions of young people in complicated ways. Mike was judged as too immature, and Sammi too unsure of herself, to take responsibility for making the 'correct choices', but these are not moral failings. On the other hand, the attempts at agency exerted by Lucy and Olivia were viewed with disapproval, which tended towards moral condemnation of choices regarded as incorrect. These judgments support ethical decisions of the adults involved, as they justify decision-making for Mike and Sammi, and criticism of Lucy and Olivia.

5.2.1 Footing shift

The professionals in this study do not blindly accept the rules, but rather negotiate a path through them: this section will compare how two professionals, James and Michelle, articulated their position in relation to Mike's situation. James maintained his position as a deputy manager throughout his interview, using the first person plural and the name of the home to talk about actions taken. In an interview of 3200 words he used 'we' 78 times. He presented his position as a professional working within a complex system, and focused on Ofsted, adopting their managerialist goals.

Michelle presented more contradictory positions, at times accepting the system but expressing more concern when she compared Mike's position to that of her own son. At the start of the interview she framed the situation as one where Mike has some sort of choice:

We – uh – have three children’s homes 12-15 then one 15-18 so he has the option of going there, we will be looking at the transition.

Although it was very clear that Mike did not want to move from his residential care home, the fact was that ‘he will move on from what we do here’ even though he was not measuring up to the ‘independence skills’ which were required. Michelle expressed a different attitude to her own son (18) who was older than Mike, and located this issue in a wider debate of when young people are ready for adulthood:

I mean *my* son. I’m sure he would be ok if he moved out now, but he wouldn’t choose to. Why would he? Years and years ahead of surviving and paying bills so why not at 18 have a bit of fun? (...) And I just think it’s harder for children in the care system. Why not extend it – that’s the only thing for me. But there are lots of other people whose children leave at 16, 17, 18 but I don’t think everyone’s ready.

Here Michelle was oscillating between the system which constrained her, saying Mike must move on, and her views towards her own son, attempting to justify the options for Mike because it is what many people have to do. This footing shift, from young people delaying being independent to the recognition that many do take this step, demonstrates different perspectives on young people becoming independent.

Another contradiction was in the range of support offered to Mike while he was at school which would stop completely once he left school in another example of abrupt chop. Michelle emphasised how positive the support was

for Mike without acknowledging how much of a shock it would be for him once it stops. This section shows the conflicts apparent when discussing the future of young people in general. Accommodating the desire of some young people to gain independence at sixteen, has seemed to encourage the development of a system where some young people have to leave care too early, as indicated by research over many years (for example Broad, 1998; Cameron, 2007, and Lepper, 2015). As Michelle said, there will be many years of adult responsibility ahead for any young person leaving care or leaving home.

5.3 Repair work

I suggested above that Isma and Jonathan, Lucy's foster carers; and Jean, Sammi's foster mother, viewed me as a sympathetic outsider, leading to new reflections on their situation. With professionals the situation seemed to be slightly different, with them setting out to defend their positions somewhat, although I was not aiming to be critical. Thus Fairclough's concept of social action creating meaning (2003) is enacted differently, with professionals presenting an argument to rebut criticisms of their decisions, even though I made none. This reveals that professionals do feel subject to attack, perhaps from previous experience or suspicion regarding my position, and repair work is a defence mechanism. For example, Leah (EWO) stressed the value of continuity and information sharing. She began her interview as if she was refuting the common criticism of the lack of consistency for looked after children:

Yes well we are very lucky here. The strength of how we work. I feel strongly that one particular strength of how we work here in the education team is that when children come into care they are allocated a link person. That person remains with them throughout their period of accommodation no matter how many moves they have, so we stay consistent in their lives.

Leah admitted here that a looked after child may have many moves, or churn, but contrasted this with her own team. She mentioned the stability of the team on two other occasions, stating 'We are a dedicated and committed team'. She seemed to wish to defend this presentation because she engaged in repair work about a change in the team 'she has since moved on as we have slightly re-structured and she retired'. She also said on three occasions that an educational psychologist was involved in decisions that were made, seeking to emphasise the robust nature of the decision-making process as a variety of professionals were involved. Leah was defensive about the churn, or changes in staffing, which is an inevitable part of multi-agency teams as people move on, and demonstrated that it is compounded by drawing in external experts.

Professionals are placed in the position of 'corporate parent', which some authors have suggested can be achieved by multi-agency team working (for example Anning, 2006; Fitzgerald and Kay, 2008). All the adults described themselves as their role, for example 'as the EWO on the team' (Leah), but the significance of the role was expressed in very different ways. Both social

workers and the EWO stressed the importance of being part of a team, and the limitations of their role, giving particular emphasis to the change in who is involved with a young person once s/he moves to the post-16 team.

They talked positively about having meetings, making phone calls, and working with others, seeming to stress the multi-agency nature of their work. For example, Hilary (social worker), in discussing Lucy's transition as she reaches 16, said 'behind the scenes we are working away to make sure that it all goes smoothly'. Colin, the key worker, deployed a script which constructs a problem as something which professionals can identify and discuss: 'we speak about it quite a lot in team meetings at the moment'.

This resonates with Leah's assertion that a key reason why she felt her team work effectively is that 'we meet every Thursday morning as a team and have a case discussion meeting for an hour and a half'. This repeated emphasis on team working as a positive in and of itself echoes Shaw's contention (2012) that social workers have increasingly been forced into the position of managing cases rather than building positive relationships with young people.

The professionals stressed the limits of their roles, for example 'It won't be me, it will be the 16+ team' (Hilary); and were unsure of the details of what support would be offered, demonstrating how chop is built into the system. They also located the discussion within the context of their work with other young people in care. These strategies of firstly delimiting their role, by age and by focus on education, for example; and secondly expanding their role to

take in many other young people, operated to position the professionals as 'only' responsible for certain aspects of a young person's life, while simultaneously suggesting they had responsibility for other young people too.

'Human technologies' (Hook, 2007) can be linked to the concept of the corporate parent here, where each professional only has responsibility for certain aspects of parenting, but must manage that aspect across the lives of many young people. Adults working in these roles become functions, such as finding a school place, and take up a shortened form of report style language when talking about different parts of the system: 'School was going to be needing to try and maintain...social worker was trying to encourage contact with Mum' (Leah). This focus on functions contrasts with Foley's argument (2008) that what looked after children really value are traits such as liking children, but these important relational aspects are lost in a system which focuses on outcomes.

This contrasts with the foster carers' commitment to Lucy, where Jonathan specifically rejected the limitation of their role:

It's not about being a foster carer, it is about being listened to. A parent being listened to.

When I asked about Lucy making decisions for the future Jonathan said:

I tell you, big decision we will still make them. No matter where she is we will still make them.

This demonstrated their long-term commitment to Lucy, but it was true that Lucy could leave her foster carers and they would not be able to make

decisions. Their commitment reflects how parenting occurs in the general population without limits, but contrasts with the segmented approach of corporate parenting.

Isma and Jonathan were in a very different position to Jean and Adam in feeling ignored and resisting that position, whereas it seemed more from Jean and Adam's point of view that they wanted to be left alone by the social workers apart from when practical issues needed to be resolved. This suggests that infrequent contact works when things are going smoothly, linking to Barnes' (2012) point that social workers are forced to focus on managing care, whereas foster carers provide it. Barnes also suggests that young people are more concerned about the process of providing care than the outcomes-driven focus of social workers.

To summarise this section, the adults worked hard to be recognised in their role, repairing possible weaknesses. For the professionals an important part of that professional identity was being part of a multi-agency team, whereas this way of working was presented as a barrier by the foster carers. The contrasting views of multi-agency teams and the difficulties of 'corporate parenting' recall some of the challenges to the concept of multi-agency teams discussed in the literature review (for example Atkinson, Jones and Lamont, 2007).

5.4 Scripts: Developmentalism, Choice and Resistance

The next section will examine some of the discourses taken up by the adults to explain their positions: developmentalism, choice and resistance.

Developmentalism and choice link closely to neoliberalism, and the drive for self-improvement and self-determination (Burman, 2005). Resistance can be linked to the previous discussion of social exclusion, where individuals who resist what is offered are judged to be 'at risk of social exclusion' (Axford, 2008, 2010). This suggests a negative moral judgment, whereas resistance suggests agency and individual autonomy.

5.4.1 Developmentalism

A key script which resonated through the four case studies was that of developmentalism linked to an essentialist view of each young person. As Burman (2008b) suggests, developmentalism is a dominant discourse throughout children's services, automatically leading to normative judgments about children and young people. Using Foucault's three axes, it can be seen that epistemological assumptions about 'normal' development located the adults as experts with superior psychological knowledge, creating differences between the young people in the study and an idealized norm. Therefore, the adults were constituted as knowing themselves as individual subjects who can 'know' which stage a young person *has* reached, and which stage they *should have* attained. To return to the epistemological position underpinning this study, social constructionism locates developmentalism as one way of

constructing perspectives regarding a young person, when other constructs and perspectives may be possible. The judgments inherent in this position link to the next of Foucault's three axes.

The discourse of developmentalism was enacted between the young people and the adults who worked with them in ways which legitimated power being exercised by the adults. The situation of having been through the development process themselves and having reached adulthood, combined with their professional position, meant that adults were in a position of power. Thus, the adults knew that Mike and Olivia would both have to move out of the residential homes where they would like to stay, and they knew that this decision would be enforced.

The professionals were planning for a complete change in the young people's lives which was not what the care leavers wanted, so an added 'chop' in their transition to adulthood was added to the churn which is an unfortunate, unavoidable feature of life for children in care. In Mike's case, the adults did not discuss with Mike what would happen, giving the reason that he became upset – but his reaction had no influence on the decision.

Similarly, Olivia resisted efforts to prepare her for moving by evading adults who wanted to meet her to discuss it, but this had no impact on decisions either. Here, the adults knew they had the power to move young people on whether or not they wished this to happen: this is legitimated by discourses of

developmentalism which are based on deontic assumptions about what young people *ought* to do at different ages.

Foucault suggests that power is intentional in that it is used to pursue certain aims; here, the moving-on of Mike and Olivia, but 'this does not mean that it results from the choice or decision of an individual subject' (Foucault, 1978, p.95 in Gallagher, 2008, p.400). Power circulates, and it exercises control over the adults who have to operate within a rigid system of provision for looked after children. Residential care is divided up according to age, so the system is designed to enforce the chop described above at critical points for the young people. Provision for care leavers is allocated at the level of the local authority rather than by individuals working with them, so the adults have to accept these points of abrupt change.

Foucault's third axis: ethics, links the first two of knowledge of the subject, and power. The adults in this study were constrained by the limitations of the care system, on which they had to base decisions. Even where these decisions were not what young people wanted, adults could mobilise their epistemological certainties about developmentalism to support their decisions. Therefore, they could present the case that it was in the best interests of a young person to move them from where they wanted to live, which supported adults' views of themselves as ethical professionals, making decisions based on expert knowledge.

Foucault's definition above of the two elements of a power relationship leads to an examination of the discursive construction of the young people as rational social actors: they were so positioned as part of the interplay of power. Thus, the adults were not cynically 'pretending' that the young people had some degree of control over their own lives, but they were rather operating within the dominant discourses of children's services, which impose 'regimes of truth' (Foucault and Gordon, 1980, p.131) making different modes of thought unthinkable to those subjected to that regime.

The power shifts between adults and young people relate to questions of taking responsibility. Silverman (2011) discusses the tensions inherent in parent-adolescent relationships, where parents have to balance being protective of their child with encouraging their child to develop independence. He analyses parents' talk, not to show how they occupy one position (too strict/too liberal/just right) but rather how parents present positions which move between the categories of too strict/too liberal depending on the immediate context. This identity work in negotiating a middle line between being responsible and encouraging independence was enacted in different ways for the different young people, and was closely linked to the concept of choice.

5.4.2 Choice

Evans (2013) suggests that a key problem for care leavers is that they may not make good decisions due to their prior experiences. This invokes two

dominant discourses: firstly, the neoliberal discourse that young people are rational agents capable of exerting choice over a range of options (Barry, 2013). The second is that psycho-dynamic reasons can be offered for perceived failures in young people's behaviour. Each case study included the concept of choice for the young people.

For Mike 'choice' was problematic. Michelle, the residential care manager said regarding Mike and his brother moving back to the area of their birth family

If they choose to sign themselves out of County care then they won't necessarily have the support because of their ages.

Michelle was hedging here by using the modal phrase 'won't necessarily' when it was clear that care leavers lost support if they moved out of area. It is questionable whether Mike was exercising a great deal of choice in this decision, as he may have been influenced by his frequent contact with his older brother; he may have been swayed by frequent contact visits; and adults reported him as having 'learning difficulties'. It seemed that what Mike would have chosen would be to stay in the residential care home, but because that was not possible it was not even discussed with him.

For Sammi the concept of choice was hypothetical. Sammi said:

I have a choice of going on my own, getting a flat and stuff like that, and they help you.

She had clearly chosen to stay with her foster carers: therefore in this case the idea of choice was very safe as Sammi was happy where she was but felt there could be other options available if required. Choice can also be linked to

aspirations, as these suggest that an individual feels they have some control over their own future. Across the four young people, only Sammi had long-term aspirations which were neither extremely vague, as for Mike and Olivia, nor completely contradictory, as for Lucy.

As Broad (2008) suggests, there is a difference between imagining a completely different life, and aspiring to a future that the young person believes they can attain. It could be suggested that stability enables looked after children to contemplate their more distant future, whereas young people experiencing both chop and churn are not in a position to have long-term aspirations. Despite guidance which attests 'the government's commitment to supporting care leavers to realise their aspirations' (HM Government, 2013a, p.5), young people can be placed in situations where their future seems so uncertain they do not make plans for the future.

As suggested by Atkins (2010, p.254), some young people are subject to a deception regarding the opportunities which are open to them, one which suggests that they can take vocational qualifications which will lead to successful and prosperous careers.

This deception facilitates the channelling of young people from lower socio-economic groups into the low-pay, low-skill work market in readiness to fulfil government demands for cheap labour as and when it is needed, and thus is in concert with the production and reproduction of labour and social class.

In Lucy's case, the adults around her expressed contrasting views on her ability to choose. Jonathan (foster carer) seemed committed to the idea of supporting Lucy in her decisions as she moved towards adulthood:

It is all, all depending on her and how she wants to walk to the next stages of her life.

He then immediately qualified this with the assertion that he and Isma will always take the big decisions. These contradictory positions expressed the tension in parenting between having responsibility for the child to prevent harm, while also accepting the current cultural and social pressures to give teenagers the freedom to make their own decisions (Silverman, 2011). Leah (EWO) and Hilary (social worker) both adopted the position of seeing Lucy as making her own choices, but then criticised those choices.

For Olivia, the phrase which was repeatedly used by Jane (PA) and echoed by Dorothy (project worker) was 'choosing not to engage'. As with Lucy, the adults provided the reasons for this choice, thereby undermining the idea of how much choice a young person actually has. Jane and Dorothy repeated that Olivia did not take up the opportunities offered because of fear and lack of confidence. It can be seen, therefore, that the concept of choice for young people is undermined by the pervasive influence of individualised psychological explanations. There is the illusion of choice – such as offering work experience or allowing young people to form relationships – but this happens within the context of adults' superior knowledge about lack of confidence as a barrier to taking up work experience (Olivia), or previous

failed relationships setting a pattern where relationship 'choices' will not be positive (Lucy).

Adults adopted contradictory positions as they pursued different purposes. At one level, they had to meet the targets of offering opportunities such as work experience and in developing relationships, but they also distanced themselves from the 'choices' young people made about these opportunities by mobilizing justifications for failures in these areas which did not relate to the inadequacy of what is offered but rather perceived weaknesses in the young people themselves.

5.4.2.1 Footing shift

Overall, the dominant discourse of choice was maintained across the interviews, but fissures were revealed by Dorothy and by Michelle, who both expressed reservations about the system. Michelle provided a positive view of Mike's situation, explaining how he was being looked after and supported, but delegating responsibility to him for steps he might take in the future. Michelle said, 'the support package is amazing really, there is so much that they can tap into', but also acknowledged the negatives of providing support:

I think the only downfall for young people in care is that they still don't take that responsibility, somebody else will do it, there's always somebody that will pick that up. And I think there's always that lack of motivation because they know their

rights and they know what they are entitled to and they have a huge safety net.

Michelle went on to express the view, however, that the support is withdrawn too early, comparing the situation to that of her own children:

I would like to see the opportunity that Mike could stay here till he was 18 if he chose to... if he chose to.

She signalled that independence at this age can be a 'worry' and a 'struggle'. She tempered this opinion, however, by drawing on developmentalism again:

On the positive side he would have that security with people he knows, on the downside he might not grow.

This problem of the transition from residential care persists, but may begin to be addressed through 'Staying Close' (HM Government, 2016).

Dorothy also picked up the theme of young people being pushed out of the care system at too young an age. When describing individual cases she listed and justified steps taken, but towards the end of the interview she began to talk more generally about the rigidity of the system. She openly acknowledged that adults are forced to follow structures rather than what may be best for a young person.

I do feel from the work I do that there is a real conflict in care between encouraging them to be independent and forcing them to be independent versus a young person's right to choose. The system doesn't give them – it doesn't give workers the autonomy to know their young people, to know

what is right for them at what time, to be flexible. It doesn't allow them.

Dorothy drew out the tensions between competing goals. The drive away from the 'missing years' (Stein, 2006) where outcomes for children in care were unknown has led to a rigid, inflexible system which seeks to promote the welfare of young people by providing strict guidelines. Tension is added by the dominant discourse of 'a young person's right to choose'. Dorothy added

I think sometimes young people aren't given the choices, to do things at their own pace and level and timescale. It is 'the book says you've got to live on your own and that's what you're going to do, that's what's going to happen whether you like it or not. It doesn't let workers support the young person's views but also support what they think is right for the young person.

Professionals are protected by the guidelines ('the book'), but also constrained by the limits of what they can offer, so resistance is limited to complaints about the system while still working within it. Dorothy recognised here that ethical professionals would wish to balance young people's choices with over-arching concern for their welfare. Michelle and Dorothy both shifted footing between justifying how the system works and expressing concerns about its impact on practice.

5.4.3 Resistance

Foucault (1982, p.780) advocates 'analyzing power relations through the antagonism of strategies'. This approach is salutary as it warns against

seeking out a unitary, rational source of power: for care leavers, there is a complex system of inter-dependent factors and drivers, but, this is not random and can be analysed. Foucault suggests that we do not begin the analysis from the point of view of power, but rather from examining how resistance illuminates the operations of power. Adults working in the area of public care of children can offer limited resistance, as it would be unethical and unprofessional to jeopardise the key goals of safeguarding, promoting welfare, and listening to young people's views. Dorothy's wish that adults could do what they think is right is neither possible in a controlled system of strict guidelines, nor acceptable in children's services which purport to give young people choices.

The myth of giving young people choices suggests that they can choose to resist. In these case studies, Sammi's story demonstrates how the system can operate relatively smoothly when a young person is compliant. She accepted, rather than resisted what was offered and so adults (and Sammi herself) could congratulate themselves on how effective support systems had been.

For the other case studies the attempts at resistance from the young people illuminated 'the antagonism of strategies' as suggested by Foucault above. For Mike, his resistance to the pressure to move out of his residential home was simply ignored, with this being framed as caring for Mike's wellbeing by allowing him to concentrate on school. When describing Olivia's resistance to

moving out of her residential care, Jane marshalled adult expertise to predict what would happen if Olivia could do as she wished:

Say for example if she stayed where she was and came out of residential at eighteen and then lived independently she wouldn't manage it: would not manage it. So as much as she sees us as the bad guys it is about preparing her for the transition to adulthood.

For Lucy, her resistance was constructed as a kind of habit, which adults must work to support her through.

In all three cases adults called upon superior knowledge, understanding and judgment to overcome resistance from the young people, with care leavers being denied choices about where they live, and adults justifying these decisions as being in their best interest. Munro, Lushey and Ward (2011) highlighted that young people want to know about planned changes to their circumstances, but in three out of the four case studies these were not discussed.

The communicative aspect of resistance was ignored by practitioners in Roesch-Marsh's analysis (2014), which can be linked to adults' responses to the young people's behaviour in this study. Adults operated within Foucault's three axes of knowledge, power and ethics to categorise young people's behaviours as 'incorrect', but this was because they did not have the option to respond instead by changing what was offered. Mike's anxiety about moving was deferred; Lucy's objections were pathologised, and; Olivia's protests were constructed as a barrier to progress.

Foucault stresses the importance of struggles of resistance which are an 'opposition to the effects of power which are linked with knowledge, competence, and qualification: struggles against the privileges of knowledge. But they are also an opposition against secrecy, deformation, and mystifying representations imposed on people' (1982, p.781). Across the case studies the professionals exercised a 'privilege of knowledge' in regard to psychological explanations for perceived deficits in the young people. This individualisation of deficiencies serves a purpose for the professionals, because 'if the young people have pre-existing 'problems' and individual psychological failings, the system into which they become enmeshed, and by implication themselves, cannot be entirely blamed for poor outcomes' (Shaw, 2012, p.365).

Not accepting what is offered was explained as a symptom of family dysfunction. These deficit approaches to resistance can be linked to discourses of social exclusion (Cabinet Office, 2009) which are based on common-sense assumptions about everyone wanting to be included. Evans and Spicer (2008) remind us to attend to the importance of resisting drives for social inclusion. When Lucy resisted what she was offered in education, for example wishing to decide herself how the Pupil Premium would be spent, and raising concerns about teachers, Leah presented this as a pattern of negative behaviour rather than valid attempts to exert some agency. Both the EWO and the social worker echoed the phrase 'patterns of behaviour', in particular in relation to relationships. Repeating these 'patterns' is framed as

being negative, due to neoliberal discourses of continuous self-improvement (Burman, 2008a).

Aiming to prevent Lucy from repeating 'the patterns of friendship and everything' was given by Leah as the reason for moving Lucy from mainstream school, although all the adults suggested that she continued to have problems with relationships. A power imbalance was maintained by this construction of Lucy's relationships as a pattern which adults could see and condemn. This psychotherapeutic position adopted by the professionals located deficits in Lucy as 'she was not in a positive frame of mind' and 'she doesn't always make such positive choices about friends and boyfriends' (Leah). Lucy's complaints and requests were not seen as resistance but rather as failure to be 'positive'.

The foster carers resisted the position they were placed within, but did what was required about attending courses. Jonathan resented being looked down upon:

They think that we are the ones without the diplomas...We go on courses but that is about the children they have had, the children they have assessed...You have to deal with – you have to find your own devices with each child.

This recognition of the unique individuality of each child is somewhat at odds with the professionals' focus on, for example 'family dysfunction'. The approach from children's services is psychotherapeutic, but 'all interventions of this sort are taken to share the same basic objective: 'normalization, that is

... the progressive elimination of social and psychological irregularities' (Hook, 2007, p.37).

5.4.4 Summary

This chapter has explored adult participants' responses to different aspects of multi-agency teams, suggesting that they can have unintended negative impacts on the lives of young people and their carers. It has also examined the concept of developmentalism, which can lead to negative judgments about young people; and the concept of resistance which provides an alternative framing of the refusal to conform.

To return to the commitment to ethically reflexive research, I must admit to having accepted a developmental view of childhood for many years, both professionally and as a parent; and to finding resistance difficult, especially when trying to provide the best one can. This serves as a reminder that, as a researcher, I am in a privileged position, having the opportunity to step back from practice and subject it to critical examination, and I acknowledge the many pressures of actually working with care leavers, as well as performing in a target-driven profession.

6. Data Interpretation

6.1 RQ3: What are the social and political implications of participants' views?

This chapter builds on the previous two of data findings and data analysis, relating to Fairclough's level of social structures, as these are mediated through orders of discourse (social practices) and enacted in social events. These are my interpretations, based on my values of criticism of neoliberalism, which have been influenced throughout this study by, for example, Burman (2012), Skeggs (2011), and Rose (2000). This chapter seeks to draw out how neoliberalism ostensibly appears to focus on 'market rationality', as defined by Oksala (2013) below, but how it actually involves moral judgments which are hidden because the values of dominant discourses seem unquestionable.

6.2 'Failure to engage'

Echoing through the interviews with professionals was the phrase 'failure to engage' which resonates with a neoliberal construction of the individual as a service user and consumer. In neoliberal society 'market rationality—cost-benefit calculation—must be extended and disseminated to all institutions and social practices' (Oksala, 2013, p.34) which means that for care leavers, they are required to make rational 'choices' which will lead to outcomes deemed acceptable by adults working in the system.

In reality there is often only one option (such as a nursery placement for Olivia) but if the young person does not accept the one option this is still framed as 'choosing not to engage' (Jane). Professionals repeated each other in discussing the care leavers as rational agents who could choose from a range of possibilities, and were expected to do this on the basis of future economic interest. As Rose (2000) suggests, problems with complying with what is offered become reformulated as an ethical problem, rather than an authentic response. In fact, when the young people did express preferences this was seen as being a subject to be avoided (for Mike), or evidence of being manipulative (Olivia), or being a troublemaker (Lucy). A system has grown up around Leaving Care Plans with courses, evening activities, initiatives and summer schools, all designed to prepare young people to make the required sorts of choices; but it cannot accommodate the inconvenient demands that young people actually make. This demonstrates that young people resist description as solely economic units, where the correct sort of investment in skills can lead to them finding their slot in the world of work.

6.3 Middle-class values

As Skeggs (2011, p.496) states, theories of the 'good and proper self... rely on ideas about self-interest, investment and/or 'playing the game''. She explains how the middle-class values assumed in these theories are taken-for-granted and invisible to the bourgeois gaze, just as ideas about gaining qualifications and choosing a career path underpin guidance for care leavers

(DfE, 2011). Skeggs (2011) goes on to examine how the values and sense of personhood for some working-class disadvantaged groups are completely outside the world of jobs and competition which is deemed ubiquitous and unquestionable in the discourses of neoliberal society. It is not the case that everyone wishes to be middle-class as people find value for their lives in different ways. 'Through the non-utilitarian affects of care, loyalty and affection, people found other routes to valuing each other outside the circuits of exchange that demand a value-return' (p.504).

Care leavers may often not have access to the networks of family and community which Skeggs describes as being crucial to those excluded from 'the game' mentioned above. She outlines how precarious employment has been for working-class people in the UK since the 1960s (p.506). The Leaving Care Plan identifies the first few steps towards gaining employment, without recognising that this is likely to be an uncertain journey. The inequality of neoliberalism is accepted unquestioningly by the adults in the interviews. Apart from for Lucy, the opportunities which are envisaged for the young people are limited to lower-paid, rather unstable jobs (nursery work for Sammi and Olivia and 'an apprenticeship somewhere' (James) for Mike). This can be viewed as realism in the face of current levels of youth unemployment, but can also be read as unquestioning acceptance of inequality as one of the drivers of progress in neoliberal society.

Sinclair, McKendrick and Scott (2010) suggest that entry at a young age into low-paid work was often not a stepping-stone to future progress but rather the

beginning of a life of 'churn' in low-paid, temporary jobs. Atkins (2010) highlights the deception which is played out on young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, when they are encouraged to pursue qualifications as a route to success, but in reality they are setting themselves on a path to low-paid and low status work. She explains how this social reproduction meets the need for cheap labour, and in the case studies of this research we can see how the process unfolds.

6.4 'At that stage'

Michelle's explanation of the situation where adults avoided discussing future moves as Mike being 'at that avoidance stage', brought together some of the themes above. It was based on theories of developmentalism, whereby adults can judge from their position of superior knowledge that a young person is going through a stage rather than expressing any 'truth' (Burman, 2012). Here the epistemological certainties of adults were shown to dominate the attempts by young people to express their own version of the truth. This explanation also linked to a psychological construction of Mike as an individual displaying certain behaviours which can be judged against an idealised norm, which in this case was acceptance (Milbourne, 2009).

The phrase also links to governmentality (Hook, 2007) because it closes down Mike's position to a temporary phase of resisting the inevitable. Part of the process of development is to develop the skills required in neoliberal society. This could be seen in operation in Mike's case. He told me himself that he did

not have a sense of humour, and had to be taught it: the same point was made by all the adults around him. It is striking that something so personal and individual as a sense of humour was taken up by the young man and those who work with him as a useful skill to learn, rather than as a unique expression of individuality. When I first met Olivia she said she needed to work on her confidence skills, and much of what was offered to young people in care in the two local authorities in question were activities designed to promote self-esteem and basic skills such as communication. However, when Olivia communicated confidently about her preferences regarding her living arrangements, this was viewed negatively.

Of course it is valuable to enable young people to feel better about themselves and to practise useful skills: this analysis does not seek to show what is 'wrong'. Foucauldian discourse analysis uncovers how the system is based on theories of individual improvement steeped in neoliberal values, and therefore the system is a construct rather than 'correct'. There needs to be a frank recognition that developing skills may not lead to the opportunities which young people seek (Atkins, 2013), leading to openness to other ways of conceptualising young people's possible futures.

6.5 Beyond the logic of capital

Skeggs (2014, p.17) explores possibilities for those who reside beyond the limits of 'the logic of capital'. 'Capital's call to neo-liberal governmentality is not easily heard by those who are excluded from and exist to mark the limit of

proper personhood, who have no access to the resources to become capital's subjects of value. Those designated as improper do not internalize the norms as has been presumed'. This can be related to young people as they are in a liminal state, at the beginning stage of achieving what Skeggs calls 'personhood'. It can also be suggested that, due to discourses of the importance of family, looked after children are positioned as outsiders.

Olivia's 'failure to engage' can be read as rejection of the norms of accepting low-paid work as the only option because it is viewed as the first step on a ladder. Similarly, Mike's 'failure' to decide on a career path can also be seen as expressing dissatisfaction with his options. Sammi did choose what was offered, which allowed smooth progress.

Lucy did not have many choices but could choose her relationships, which did not meet with adult approval. The foster carers were also focused on Lucy as part of their family rather than on any economic value, and their interview centred on their relationship with and care for her, rather than on separate functions as can be seen in the professionals' interviews. They challenged the secrecy of the system of corporate parenting, which Jonathan described as 'Chinese Whispers', and rejected the psychological approaches of the professionals for a more positive, future-oriented stance:

Whatever happened in the past is the past, but your future is yours. We can't sort yesterday out but we can sort tomorrow.

This positive view of being able to build a life, whatever has happened, is based on the practical steps talked about by Lucy's foster carers. It can be

contrasted with the negative predictions made by professionals, for example in presenting Lucy as difficult.

6.6 Other possible interpretations

My methodological stance has been tentative, not claiming to uncover 'the truth' about the case studies, but rather to offer some possible interpretations. It follows, therefore, that other readings could have been explored: one of these will be suggested below. A focus on safeguarding would have offered additional perspectives. The aim of this section is not to undermine the previous analysis and interpretation, but rather to acknowledge the complexity of social situations.

6.6.1 Safeguarding

Higgins, Goodyer and Whittaker (2015) suggest that concerns for safeguarding have led to a system which is very constraining for social workers, limiting their professional freedom. The situations described above could be analysed as arising from a focus on child protection which leads to all professionals being risk-averse and ensuring they complete required steps in a process rather than focusing on what a young person actually needs. This offers another perspective for critiquing what the authors call 'the bureaucratisation of practice'. The discussion above about choice could have been examined from a safeguarding perspective, for example in the case of Lucy. Again, adults ultimately held the power as they could stand back to

watch a young person making decisions, then judge those decisions as inadequate, giving psychological, individualised explanations for these 'mistakes', which for Lucy were in her relationships. Hilary described how Lucy did not seem to have close female friends but:

She does tend to go more for the boyfriend side of things, she gives herself to that. Her relationships seem to be quite short span, she says that she gets bored quite quickly. But she will also tell them a lot about her life, share a lot with them so she will make herself quite vulnerable really. That's something that her carers are always talking to her about, challenging her about that area of her life, they want her to make some wise choices and protect herself. But she struggles and I think it is based on the pattern of previous relationships, she has experienced a lot of rejection, a lot of disappointment from her Mum and Dad and that affects her. But she does relate to people.

Dominant discourses concerning young people operate in contradictory ways: at one level, Hilary passed responsibility to the carers as they were the adults living with Lucy and discussing events with her daily, and this level picked up the language of safeguarding with 'wise choices' and 'protect'. Hilary here expressed approval of the carers' role in persevering with tackling issues ('always talking') and picks up a phrase which could come from a training course: 'challenging her about that area of her life', as if a young person can be compartmentalised into different areas which can be tackled one by one.

Hilary oscillated between being sympathetic towards Lucy ('she struggles'), seeking to be positive ('she does relate to people') and taking a more remote, intellectual stance which framed Lucy's perceived failures in relationships as being 'based on the pattern of previous relationships' and due to rejection and disappointment. Of course it is not unreasonable to suggest that experiences of failed relationships in early life have an impact on subsequent relationships: the tension here is between an avowed intention to encourage a young person to make decisions about relationships, and an approach based on theories of attachment which suggest that it is all too understandable that a young person will fail to establish positive relationships. The use of 'pattern of relationships' suggested that Lucy was in some way trapped by her past, which an external adult could perceive but not change.

The dilemma for professionals between safeguarding and allowing young people to develop relationships leads to the situation which Hilary described, lessening the danger with the use of the colloquial 'blokes':

She can get into relationships with blokes that are older than her, into alcohol, drugs and have expectations that she will sleep with them. So we are trying to keep her away from that because it only seems to do her damage really.

This conflict between young women 'choosing' to have relationships with older men and sexual exploitation is very topical. It is echoed for Lucy in Leah's statement that her main concern for Lucy's future is around relationships as 'she doesn't always make such positive choices about friends and boyfriends'.

6.7 Update

Two years after the original data collection I asked for an update from the gatekeepers to my participants. At that point Mike had stayed in the same area, living in supported lodgings, and attending college. Sammi was still living with the same foster carers and working at the same nursery, following through the stages of her apprenticeship. Lucy was attending college where she was studying Beauty Therapy and her living arrangements were in transition. Olivia had moved back to the area of her birth family and was currently classed as NEET (not in education, employment or training), although she had previously been attending college. Across the four case studies, therefore, only Sammi had followed the plan which she, her foster carers and the professionals described at the stage of the interviews. Mike had not returned to the area of his birth family, so was still receiving support from the same local authority, which was a more positive outcome than the professionals envisaged. Lucy was not pursuing qualifications which would allow her to attend university, which was the plan expressed by Lucy herself and by all the adults. The reservations of her foster carers about the long-term impact of leaving mainstream education proved to have been correct.

Olivia was losing touch with the care system, and was an example of the care leavers identified by the CSJ (2014) as needing the most support because they are not in education. The CSJ (2014) state that 64 percent of young people leave care from situations which are less stable than a long-term foster

placement, and the case studies above demonstrate how this can result from earlier decisions about, for example, leaving a residential care home.

The context has also changed since I collected my data. The number of care leavers has increased rapidly, and more young people are coming into care after the age of sixteen, due to legislative changes which mean a young person must be taken into care if they are homeless or on remand (DfE, 2016b). The 57 percent rise in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) is also having an impact on leaving care services, with all local authorities being asked to provide accommodation (p.42). There is an urgent need for research into these changes.

7. Conclusion

The conclusion includes recommendations, next steps and contribution to knowledge.

7.1 Recommendations

The following recommendations for educational practice arise from the situations described in each case study. Mike's experiences highlight the need to prevent the chop of moving from full-time support in school to the absence of support after leaving school. Sammi's situation demonstrates that, although instability continues to be a major problem for looked after children and care leavers, churn in professionals and chops in school placement can be mitigated with stability in living arrangements. Her progress through her apprenticeship demonstrates that it is possible to access a long-term career path, even without many formal qualifications. The current focus on apprenticeships may offer possibilities for alternative routes to qualifications, although Atkins (2009, 2010) reminds us that opportunities may be illusory.

Sammi's experiences suggest, however, that designated teachers should lead on ensuring greater understanding of looked after children amongst staff, to avoid wherever possible problems such as that faced by Sammi when her school trip finished early and she was treated differently from everyone else. It is recommended that schools, LAC and Leaving Care teams consider carefully the timing and location of meetings to minimise the risk of singling out looked after children, which Sammi resented. PEP meetings should be scheduled to accommodate the wishes of the young person rather than for the convenience of professionals.

Lucy's case suggests that the chop of moving out of mainstream education to segregated provision can have damaging long-term consequences. It is vital that this step is avoided wherever possible, but also that possibilities for returning to mainstream education are maintained. Even though Lucy, her carers and social worker were all positive about her potential to go to university, a decision made when she was twelve seemed to have closed off that opportunity. The idea that the chop of leaving mainstream education closes down the possibility of return also links to Olivia's situation, where becoming NEET and moving area could lead to her losing touch with leaving care services, when she needed to have further options.

A recommendation arising across the case studies is for there to be earlier intervention to involve young people in planning for their future. This needs to be handled sensitively as it may be necessary to challenge care leavers if their plans are vague, contradictory or unrealistic. There also needs to be recognition that young people's plans do not arise in a vacuum but are influenced by others, such as in Mike's case. The orthodoxy of 'giving young people a voice' (McLeod, 2007) can currently mean that they are encouraged to express views as an end in itself, when there needs more honesty and realism about what options exist (Atkins, 2010). In addition, there should be more flexibility in considering options for young people, allowing for false starts, changes of mind and the exploration of a broad range of possibilities rather than enforced 'engagement' with a very limited range of qualifications or work experience .

A shift away from professionals' reliance on psychological theories would require significant change. It is not that these theories are irrelevant, but rather that other approaches could help to ensure that factors such as structural disadvantage challenge conceptions of individual deficits. For example, the negative terms used by Sammi herself about her academic abilities could be challenged by a focus on the fact that she had missed substantial sections of schooling, leading to a concentration on what is essential in education rather than the need for her to catch up. The recognition that a developmental perspective on a young person is only one paradigm, and that other approaches are possible, would offer the opportunity to consider different interpretations of, and solutions for, each young person.

The main recommendation for policy from this research is for more to be done to prevent care leavers facing an imposed change in living arrangements at sixteen. This has been identified as a problem to be tackled through the extension of the 'Staying Put' programme, but unless there is investment from central government in providing financial support, foster carers will continue to face a financial disincentive to extending care. This requires further investment in recruiting more foster carers and increasing their financial security.

The proposed piloting of the 'Staying Close' programme is a positive development, but this study suggests that the problem of young people being required to leave residential care at sixteen, whether or not they feel ready to

do so, is urgent. Slow progress in piloting and evaluation would not help those young people now approaching leaving care.

Stability could also be improved by reviewing the use of multi-agency teams. The recent review of residential care (DfE, 2016b, p.22) recognises the importance of young people having continuing relationships with one key adult, but contradicts this by calling for more agencies to be involved in the lives of care leavers. The bureaucratic chop of shifting from the Looked after Children team to the Leaving Care team adds to the social churn in care leavers' lives caused by, for example, unplanned but predictable changes in personnel such as promotion, reorganisation or maternity/paternity leave. Young people's lives are therefore subject to planned, but avoidable, chops due to services which are arranged in different teams, and unplanned, but predictable, churn resulting from the large number of personnel involved.

It would be beneficial to conduct further research into the role that sibling relationships can play in providing stability, as advocated by the CSJ (2014), to combat the contraction in social networks identified by Munro, Lushey and Ward (2012). It is vital that, when a care leaver moves away from the area where they have been in care, this does not result in a complete rupture of that young person's access to support. This is another area where research could influence positive change in practice. As mentioned earlier, research in the area of looked after children and care leavers is urgent due to the rapid changes in the sector.

Finally, it is recommended that there could be independent visitors for foster carers as well as looked after children. They can feel that they are not listened to, or that they are given contradictory advice and information. The provision of neutral, external but interested listeners could help foster carers to reflect on their situation and possible solutions to problems, or to express frustrations, without feeling that they are being judged.

7.2 Next steps

This study has shown that despite repeated recommendations to ensure young people do not leave care before they are ready (DfE, 2011), in practice professionals working with care leavers are involved in systems and processes which continue to propel some young people out of the care system with an abrupt chop in their living arrangements. Since the start of this study there have been changes in provision for care leavers, with Staying Put being rolled out (HM Government, 2013b), but it is not accessible for all young people in foster care as carers have their pay cut once children reach eighteen, so there is an incentive for foster carers to take in younger looked after children, and move out the older care leavers. There is also an incentive for local authorities to encourage this as there continues to be a shortage of foster carers.

In addition, residential care has only been extended with the piloting of 'Staying Close' (HM Government, 2016). This study has suggested that possible reasons for the continuation of practice which forces the transition before young people are ready can be explored through the theoretical

framework of critical discourse analysis, which proposes that dominant discourses delimit what can be said and thought. In these case studies, discourses of developmentalism and neoliberalism prescribe what can be thought and enacted upon, determining that young people are required to meet targets of 'making progress', 'finding their identity' and 'realising potential' (Cabinet Office, 2009). Despite purported commitment to allowing young people to stay in care until they are ready to leave, these discourses influence practices which propel young people towards an exit from care, whether they are ready or not. Sissay (2015, in Khaleeli, 2015) suggests that prejudice against children in care is widespread, but it is too easy to blame social services and politicians: 'Institutions and local governments could not get away with it if the wider public said: 'These are children. These are our children'' (Khaleeli, 2015).

Since beginning this study I have become involved in a project entitled 'Aspire 2 Uni' which aims to identify looked after children at the end of primary school who have the potential to progress to university, and to support them throughout their secondary education to enable them to achieve their aims. This may seem that I am accepting the dominant discourses which I have criticised above, as the project seems to align with the 'realising potential' discourses of neoliberalism.

In defence of the project, its aim is to provide long-term consistent support, as called for in much of the literature reviewed, for example in overcoming the many barriers in education (Berridge, 2009; Berridge, Brodie and Pitts, 2001;

and Bhabra, Ghate and Brazier, 2002). In addition the money from the project will be used to allow looked after children to access whatever opportunities they choose, not just university. One of the key strands is to encourage young people to engage in enrichment activities such as sports, theatre and outdoor activities, as well as experiences linked more directly to aspirations, such as science or art taster sessions at universities, or visits to a range of workplaces. This project does not directly address the main problem identified above, of young people being forced out of care, but it does offer indirect solutions as young people can be supported to stay for longer with foster carers if they are in higher education. I am hopeful of this project as it provides a way of using funds (from a charitable trust as well as local authorities) to support young people through and out of care, but I also hope that this study will add to the argument that funding also needs to be found from the government to allow young people to stay in residential care until they are ready to leave.

The CSJ (2014) identify, however, that support for care leavers who remain in education is already much better than for those who leave, so I would like in future to expand research in the area of the majority of care leavers who do not pursue educational qualifications. For this study I moved away from participatory research with young people at an early stage due to my ethical concerns about the power imbalance between adults and looked after children, and about adding to the social work gaze they experience throughout their time in care. To tackle some of the complexities of capturing

authentic participant voices within such sensitive research requires a different methodological approach.

In future I would like to explore the possibilities of peer research (Lushey and Munro, 2014) as a participative approach, and as a way of uncovering and understanding the perspectives of young people who leave care into uncertain situations and try to build their lives. I began with a focus on education as a potential route towards positive outcomes, but realised that, although there are stark differences, looked after children who remain in education are those most likely to have the most support (CSJ, 2014). It is vital, therefore, to learn from the experiences of young people such as Olivia, trying to understand her life from her point of view, rather than blaming her for making poor choices in a 'failure to engage'.

7.3 Contribution to knowledge

The unique contribution of this study to knowledge in the field of education is in the application of CDA to data about plans for care leavers. Fairclough's three-level model of CDA has drawn out the tensions and contradictions expressed by young people and adult participants regarding plans for the future. This relates in particular to the ways in which looked after children may be constructed as having special educational needs. At the level of personal interaction, young people can be categorised either as being in need of support, if they accept the label, or as having behavioural difficulties, if they resist.

Educators should look critically at the application of labels to looked after children, which can be supported at the level of professional interaction with acceptance of individual deficits related to attachment theory. Looked after children should be considered in the light of systemic failings. Instead, each level of analysis extends the individualisation of young people, from personal relationships characterised by support or resistance; through professional discourses of trauma and resilience; to societal discourses of individual responsibility and self-improvement. It is recommended that structural and systemic barriers are also considered in PEP meetings and leaving care plans.

This study's contribution to practice in the field of education includes several small adjustments such as the designated teacher ensuring greater understanding, and consideration of the timing of meetings. The initial focus of my research was on aspirations for care leavers and this is where substantial change should be made.

Three of the young people in this study had either contradictory or rather vague aspirations, and it has been suggested that this could be because they are considered at the stage of leaving care, perhaps driven by the requirements of the leaving care plan. It is recommended that work begins at a much earlier stage to consider a range of different possibilities, and to provide a variety of experiences to enable young people to have greater understanding of wider opportunities. It is also important that options are kept

open over a longer period, rather than channelling a young person into one route as happened with Olivia. This is the approach adopted by the Aspire2Uni project, and could be followed by other Local Authorities and Universities. Recommendations arising from this project will be fed back to the gatekeepers at the participating Local Authorities, to the steering group of the Aspire2Uni project, and to practitioner organisations including the Fostering Network, the Who Cares? Trust and the recently-formed Rees: The Care leavers Association.

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Request for Ethical Approval

Section 1 – to be completed by the researcher

Full name	Catherine Lamond
Module number and title (student researchers only)	ED5015 Thesis
Research Proposal title	Aspirations of young people in care: a study of expectations, priorities and goals for the future of young people in care, and the key adults who work with them.
Brief outline of proposal	<p>Life chances for young people from a care background are disproportionately poor (DfE, 2011). This study will examine the expectations, priorities and goals for the future of looked after children (LAC) at a key stage in their lives, when they are beginning to prepare to leave care. It will explore in depth the aims of six individual LAC, to build up a detailed picture of expectations, priorities and goals for these young people. Key adults who work with each young person will also be asked, on an individual basis, to discuss their expectations, priorities and goals for the young person in their care, and to relate these to the requirements of their professional role. These rich narratives of 'what life could be/ what life will be' will be compared between the young person and the adults who are in control of many of the resources for the young person, as well as between the key adults. The result will be a complex, multi-layered picture of the diverse expectations, priorities and goals surrounding a young person as they prepare to leave care. The study will aim to uncover some of the competing discourses at play, and to examine how power relations are enacted at this crucial stage in a young person's life.</p>
Level of research, e.g. staff, undergraduate, postgraduate, master's (award related), MPhil, PhD	EdD
Please outline the methodology that would be implemented in the course of this research.	<p>This study will take an interpretivist approach and gather qualitative data from several case studies where specific young people will be the target of interest. Data collection will be by repertory grid technique, based on Personal Construct theory (Kelly, 1955), in individual interviews. Six young</p>

	<p>people will be identified, with five or six key adults for each, through purposive sampling. The population of young people leaving care at any one time is small compared to the overall care population, and is not a homogeneous group, so the sample cannot claim to be typical cases. I will use contacts in Local Authorities (LAs) in the West Midlands to gain access and will ensure that full information is given from the beginning about the purpose and conduct of the study before seeking informed consent from individuals.</p>
<p>Please indicate the ethical issues that have been considered and how these will be addressed.</p>	<p>Research with LAC raises the question of whether it is ethical to add to the ‘social work gaze’ (Renold et al., 2008) of surveillance of these young people, carried out by adults who pass in and out of their lives. My means of addressing this problem is to aim to be clear about the purpose and conduct of the project, and to engage in ongoing reflexivity to ensure the impact of the project on the participants is always considered. Regular meetings with my supervisory team will assist me in discussing ethical issues throughout. LA staff working in the area of Leaving Care are keen to understand more about the process from the viewpoint of young people, and this study will address this need.</p> <p>It could be that the young people disclose experiences or plans in relation to what might be considered deviant behaviour, for example substance misuse or sexual activity. An important part of the initial discussions with gatekeepers will be to plan how to handle any disclosures, and to build this information into the seeking of informed consent.</p> <p>Exploring issues of identity and life chances would present ethical challenges in working with any young person, but is particularly sensitive for LAC who may have had few opportunities to develop a secure sense of self, or may feel that they are already disadvantaged in the difficult transition to adulthood. It must be acknowledged that this study could stir up anxiety or other negative feelings for the young people who participate, and I must be clear about this in the consent form – while providing suggestions of how to proceed if difficult emotions are uncovered.</p> <p>Exploring the views of key adults also raises ethical issues, as they may express unease with current</p>

	<p>policies and procedures with which their practice must conform. To prepare as far as possible for the sorts of difficulties which may arise I will talk to experienced members of the Fostering Network; social workers; educational psychologists; key workers; and teachers, to be forewarned of some of the tensions that may arise.</p> <p>A small-scale pilot study will help to reveal ethical issues which may arise during the full study, and will enable me to plan with LA gatekeepers signposting to appropriate support. LA staff will help to identify young people who are preparing to leave care and will suggest those who are managing the process with some degree of resilience, so my sample will not include the most vulnerable young people.</p>
<p>Please indicate any issues that may arise relating to diversity and equality whilst undertaking this research and how you will manage these.</p>	<p>Exploring identity raises complex issues of equality and diversity, as the study must be careful to avoid reinforcing existing inequalities. LAC may not have a secure grasp of their own identity in relation to 'race', ethnicity or religious belief, especially if they have experienced living in families with different ethnic or religious backgrounds. They may also have experienced conflicting examples, guidance and views on how to perform class, gender and sexuality. Asking any disabled person about their goals for the future risks reminding them that they may feel certain possibilities are not open to them, so this issue must be handled carefully. The preparation with LA gatekeepers of signposts for relevant support and guidance will be crucial to inform myself and so participants of next steps.</p> <p>The key adults in this study may also feel oppressed, which raises further issues of equality and diversity – for example being seen as 'only a foster Mum', without the due recognition of the key role this person plays. The study cannot resolve existing power imbalances but can, through highlighting these, promote more positive relationships in future.</p>

Please answer the following questions by deleting the inappropriate response:

1. Will your research project involve young people under the age of 18?

Yes

If yes, do you have an Enhanced Disclosure Certificate from the Criminal Records Bureau?

Yes

2. Will your research project involve vulnerable adults?

No

3. For which category of proposal are you applying for ethical approval?

B

Confirmation of ethical approval

Section 2 – to be completed as indicated, by module leader, supervisor and/or chair of ethics sub-committee

Category B proposals:

I confirm that the proposal for research being made by above student/member of staff is a category B proposal and that all requirements for category B proposals have been met.

Feedback	
<p>Clearly this is a demanding piece of work with significant ethical issues but the student demonstrates a high level of awareness of the range of ethical considerations. An effort has been made to address them in the research design (including an ongoing contingency plan). The submission is very detailed and appears to have covered all relevant points.</p> <p>The school ethics sub-committee has considered your proposal for a research project</p> <p>The proposal is accepted.</p> <p>A further request form must be submitted if there are significant changes in the nature of the research process described on the original.</p>	

On behalf of members of staff and students

I confirm that the proposal for research being made by above student/member of staff is a category B proposal and that s/he may now continue with the proposed research activity:

Signed	
Name of chair of ethics sub-committee	Dr L Devlin

Any conditions attached to this ethical approved (attached on a separate sheet)	No
Date	3.05.12