Educational psychologists' experiences of establishing and promoting pupil voice among children in care.

Andy Donaldson

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Full name	Andy Donaldson
Student number	1608955
School	Psychology
Degree:	DEdPsy
Full title of thesis	Educational psychologists' experiences of establishing and promoting pupil voice among children in care.

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Summary

This thesis is composed of three key parts, each part is divided into sections and further sub-sections as appropriate. The three parts are: a major literature review; an empirical study; and a critical appraisal.

Part 1 includes a detailed summary of, and critical engagement with, existing relevant literature. This focuses on literature related to: children in care and the outcomes they experience; theoretical underpinnings of those outcomes; the voice of children in care; and the role of educational psychologists (EPs). This section concludes by outlining the rationale for the current study.

Part 2 is an account of the current study. A brief summary of the theoretical rationale will be provided, followed by a detailed account of the methodology and resulting methods used within the study, including why they were chosen. Results of the study are presented and discussed, with conclusions drawn and relevance to future EP practice as well as implications for the wider knowledge base considered.

Part 3 provides a critical appraisal of the research study undertaken, specifically engaging with strengths and weaknesses of the study, as well as reflections on the ontological and epistemological stances taken. This section will also consider dissemination of research findings to further inform future research and practice.

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Part 1 – Major Literature Review

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1. Introduction

Despite multiple sources of legislation and policy initiatives to eliminate it (e.g. Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2007), the gap in attainment experienced by children within local authority care continues (Department for Education (DfE), 2019). This is additionally problematic given the ever-increasing number of children in local authority care (DfE, 2019).

A review of existing literature suggests that the voice of children in care (CiC) is not utilised fully within decision-making processes, despite research also suggesting this may lead to more effective strategy identification and implementation (Roffey, 2013). Given the role and skillset of educational psychologists (Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), 2000) and their position within relevant systems, it could be argued they can play a valuable role in the promotion of CiC voice.

It is therefore argued that exploring the EP role within eliciting and promoting CiC voice may be a useful avenue for research aimed at improving the outcomes for CiC.

1.1. Summary of literature review

The literature review will comprise a detailed examination of the existing literature with regard to the outcomes and experiences of CiC, the underpinning theory related to those experiences and the importance of ascertaining and promoting their views.

The first section will focus on CiC; seeking to outline who they are, what experiences they may have had and what outcomes they are subject to.

Having engaged with the different outcomes for CiC, the next section will seek to understand why CiC experience these different outcomes, with a specific focus on the potential theoretical foundations of the additional challenges CiC face, including theory related to attachment, adverse childhood experiences and post-traumatic stress disorder.

The focus of the literature review will then turn to pupil voice and its role in promoting improved outcomes. This section will also consider whether this might have particular value for CiC and why that may be the case.

Having considered the value of research with CiC and the rationale for a specific emphasis on participation and voice, attention will then be directed towards educational psychologists (EPs) and the role they can play in the elicitation and promotion of voice among CiC.

Finally, the rationale for the current study will be outlined.

1.2. Research sources and search terms

Literature to be reviewed was identified through the use of databases including PsycINFO, ERIC, ORCA and Google Scholar. In addition, links through citations within key articles were followed.

The search terms used included children in care, children looked after, looked after children, educational psychologists, educational psychology, voice, views, and opinions. Searches were modified to include word variants, such as psycholog* to include results for psychology, psychologists etc. In addition, search terms were combined to narrow searches and identify relevant papers.

1.3. Inclusion/exclusion criteria for research

The majority of research considered relates to the care system within the UK. This is because different countries will have different understandings of the role of educational psychologists and different state care systems, resulting in a greater potential for false comparisons. One key exception to this will be the theoretical underpinnings including, for example, attachment theory. These underlying theories can transcend national boundaries and are less dependent on nation-specific data. That being said, consideration is still given to the time and culture within which theories are developed.

Where possible recent research is used, in recognition of the ever-changing nature of care provision and the EP role. Older research has been included where it represents work of particular significance, or where it has been important to the subsequent development of key theories. The literature review adopts a narrative style, in recognition of the limited existing research directly applicable to the specific research question, with a resulting opportunity to record the journey towards the final research questions through a narrative thread and therefore justify the rationale of the project.

2. Children in Care

A child in care is identified within the Children Act 1989 as a child who is within local authority care or provided with accommodation by the authority for any reason. As outlined in the act, the term can also include children and young people who are under a 'care order' but still living at home. The care order is granted by the court and places a child or young person under the supervision of a local authority. The local authority therefore assumes legal parental responsibility for the child, usually until the child's 18th birthday, although this can be extended to age 21 within residential provisions.

In addition to being known as 'children in care', this group of children and young people are commonly referred to as looked after children, children looked after and foster children, among other names. Although children in care is not the most common group name used, it was identified by children in care themselves as their preferred option during research carried out by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC, 2019).

The number of CiC in England is 78,150 according to the most recent available statistics (31 March 2019), a 4% increase on the previous year (DfE, 2019). Whilst the number of CiC has increased, those being adopted from care are decreasing in number, with a 7% fall in the last year to 3,570 and a 33% drop since the peak in 2015 (5,360, DfE, 2019).

There are many reasons why children may be taken into local authority care, including family dysfunction, acute family stress, absent parenting, and child or parent illness or disability. The most common reason, however, is abuse or neglect, accounting for 63% of those in care. (DfE, 2019)

It should be noted that the lower designation of 'child in need' is also used within some of the literature. This is a distinct group from those 'in care', as the local authority has not assumed parental responsibility and the young person in question is not considered to be at immediate risk of harm, despite receiving additional support and monitoring to enable them to be adequately supported (Children Act 1989). These children are not included within the government data for those 'in care' and have therefore not been included within this literature review or study.

2.1. CiC: a homogenous group?

The use of the collective term 'children in care' could be argued to imply a high level of homogeneity within the CiC population. It should, however, be noted that children enter care for a variety of different reasons (DfE, 2019) and will therefore have had different life experiences. Indeed, even those taken into care for the same reason may have experienced that factor in different ways, with arguably different frequencies and intensity of experiences and perhaps different individual coping strategies.

One example of an area of significant variance is in the accommodation of CiC. DfE statistics (2019) indicate that whilst the majority (72%) of CiC are in foster care, this figure divides further into those living with a relative or friend as their foster carer (13%) and those with an unknown foster carer (58%). This also leaves over a quarter of CiC: living in secure units, children's homes or semi-independent living accommodation (12%); living with parents (7%); living independently (4%); or placed for adoption (3%). Connelly and Chakrabarti (2008) highlight the discrepancies in research findings between those in residential care and those in foster care.

Although CiC does not constitute a homogenous group, it can be argued there are many areas within which CiC may be disadvantaged compared to their peers who aren't in care. This may suggest there is an element of shared experience between many CiC, even when the specifics of their situations may have been very different. Therefore, research relating to CiC will continue to be the area of focus, with a caveat remaining that individual circumstances should be considered in practice.

2.2. Legislation related to CiC

The poorer educational outcomes experienced by CiC have been in the public eye, to some extent, for a long time. Jackson (1987) highlights the issue, with subsequent recognition within government policy (Department of Health (DoH), 1991; Utting, 1991). However, emphasis on CiC as an educational priority only emerged 5 years later with the *Focus on Teenagers* publication (DoH, 1996). This priority also crystalised into a specific focus on CiC attainment (DoH, 1998).

During subsequent years the importance of multiagency working was emphasised, including within the 'Every Child Matters' framework (DfES, 2003), which also outlined key rights for every child to: be healthy; be safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution; achieve economic well-being.

The emphasis on CiC attainment was then reflected in an amendment to Section 22 of the Children's Act 1989, with Section 52 of the Children's Act 2004 imposing a statutory duty on local authorities to raise the academic achievement of CiC. Further statutory requirements introduced subsequently included the introduction of Personal Education Plans (PEPs), the creation of designated teachers and greater emphasis on education within placement decisions. This was accompanied by additional funding for CiC provision (DfES, 2007).

2.3. Educational outcomes for CiC

The educational attainments of CiC continue to lag behind those of their peers, across the core subjects and throughout the key stages (DfE, 2019). This is highlighted by the data presented in Tables 1 and 2 below, which compare expected outcome measures for CiC compared to their peers who aren't in care.

Table 1 – Percentage of pupils reaching expected levels in Key Stages 1&2 (DfE, 2019)

Phase	Subject	Children in care (% reaching expected level)	Children not in care (% reaching expected level)	Difference (percentage points)
Key Stage 1	Reading	51	75	24
	Writing	42	70	28
	Maths	49	76	27
Key Stage 2	Reading	51	75	24
	Writing	49	78	29
	Maths	47	76	29

Table 2 – Key Stage 4 attainment measures (DfE, 2019)

	Measure	Children in care	Children not in care	Difference
Key Stage 4	Attainment 8 score	18.8	44.4	25.6
	Percentage achieving GCSE English & Maths at grade 4 or above	17.5%	59.4%	41.9

In addition to lower average academic attainments, CiC are less likely than their peers to complete primary or secondary school (DfE, 2018) and experience a significantly higher rate of school exclusions, with 8% of CiC given at least one fixed term exclusion in 2017 compared to 2% of all children (DfE, 2018). This echoes Brodie's (2010) assertion that a disproportionate number of CiC experience exclusion from school or time out of school. Interestingly, the rate of permanent exclusions for children in care in 2017 was the same as the rate for all children (DfE, 2018), which may be a reflection of additional support in place and pressure on schools to avoid permanently excluding CiC. It should be noted that the higher rate of permanent exclusions among children 'in need' brings up the average for 'all children', meaning the true rate of permanent exclusions for CiC is likely to be slightly higher than those who are neither 'in care' or 'in need'.

When considering the poorer outcomes experienced by many CiC educationally, it is also important to note that being 'in care' does not guarantee poorer outcomes. Indeed, individual CiC can and do achieve well academically, potentially overcoming significant obstacles to do so. Whilst there is very little research on the positive academic outcomes for CiC, a study by Jackson and Cameron (2014) highlighted a group of young people judged to show academic promise at age 16. Of 32 CiC included in the study, 25 were still in education when interviewed aged 18-24, with 12 attending university. Stability of school and care placements; financial, practical and key adult support; and individual motivation were identified as being the key factors underpinning their success.

As well as being additionally complex (Brodie, 2010), it could also be argued that equating the achievements of CiC with others creates an unfair comparison. If an individual achieved well academically while going through significant illness or facing physical threats to their safety, it could be argued that their achievements are greater than those who didn't encounter the same adversity. If a child or young person perceives him/herself to be under threat as a result of previous experiences, that could perhaps be considered as debilitating and therefore an equivalent achievement level may be difficult to identify.

2.4. Special educational needs (SEN) among CiC

Berridge (2007) argues that the lower academic attainment of CiC needs to be understood with reference to the higher prevalence of SEN within the CiC population. The most recent statistics show that within England CiC are almost 4 times as likely to have an identified SEN and over 9 times as likely to have a statement of SEN or an education, health and care plan (EHCP) when compared with the wider population (DfE, 2018).

Interestingly, Berridge (2007) also suggests that research evidence is unclear regarding whether the higher rates of SEN identified within CiC are caused by innate factors or by the care system itself. This raises a potentially important question about the relationship between the care system and pre-care factors in determining the needs of CiC.

2.5. Does the system help or harm?

The role played by the care system in the negative outcomes prevalent for those within it is a contentious issue, with many researchers pointing to pre-care experiences including neglect, abuse and chaotic family environments as being the key factor in children's increased risk to poor outcomes (e.g. Goemans, van Geel, & Vedder, 2015; Romano, Babchishin, Marquis, & Fréchette, 2014; Scherr, 2007). For example, Goemans, van Geel, van Beem and Vedder (2016) suggest that when CiC are compared with other children exposed to similar risks and experiences the achievement gap is significantly reduced.

However, others place a greater burden of responsibility on the system itself, arguing that the needs of CiC are not adequately met and a lack of progress is the result of that failure (e.g. Ainsworth & Hansen, 2014; Connelly & Chakrabarti, 2008; Jackson, 2007). Winter (2006) suggests that even when pre-care experiences are accounted for, outcomes for CiC remain poor.

It appears unclear what proportion of responsibility can be ascribed to the care system relative to the early experiences. Perhaps both factors contribute, or perhaps the balance of causality is unique to different individuals, with the varying impact of pre-care experiences and the nature of the care received.

2.6. Longer term prospects for CiC

The disadvantages experienced by CiC are not restricted to the educational sphere, with poorer outcomes more common among CiC during later life as well (Dixon, 2008; Hook & Courtney, 2011; Centre for Social Justice, 2015). Research conducted by the Centre for Social Justice (2015) suggests that those adults who were CiC are at a greater risk of mental health problems, homelessness, unemployment, welfare dependency and imprisonment. Within this overarching average there is likely to be individual variation according to the age of the young person when taken into care and the duration of their time in care.

With such far-reaching negative outcomes associated with being in care, it may be even more important to utilise opportunities to reverse the seeming inevitability of disadvantage. Okpych and Courtney (2014) suggest that education has the power to do just that, with better educational outcomes leading to greater employment prospects and higher earnings among those leaving care.

Summary

CiC numbers continue to increase (DfE, 2019) and although they arguably do not form a homogenous group, the majority are in care due to some form of abuse or neglect (DfE, 2019). The attainment gap to their peers remains (DfE, 2019), and they are less likely to complete primary or secondary school, facing higher rates of exclusion (DfE, 2018). CiC are more likely than others to have SEN, and the role the system plays in ameliorating or exacerbating those needs is unclear (Berridge, 2007). Over the longer term, CiC are more likely to experience a range of negative outcomes, including unemployment, homelessness and mental health issues (Centre for Social Justice, 2015).

Having considered the additional vulnerabilities and negative outcomes faced by CiC, the next section will explore some of the key theories seeking to explain why CiC outcomes are poorer than those of the general population and why some succeed despite early disadvantage.

3. Theoretical underpinnings of CiC outcomes

Within this section some of the major theories related to the impact of early trauma and relational difficulties, and their influence on CiC outcomes will be explored. It should be noted that it is beyond the scope of this review to provide an exhaustive account of all relevant theory. A brief summary of the most common trauma-related theories is therefore provided.

3.1. Adverse childhood experiences

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) is a term that has been coined to represent specific factors that cause children to experience chronic stress (Bellis et al., 2016). While abuse and neglect are included within the term, it also incorporates a broader group of circumstances and experiences, summarised as 'household dysfunction', that can impact on the complexity of a child's life, such as parental mental health or imprisonment and substance misuse. The 10 categories of ACE are summarised in Figure 1 below.
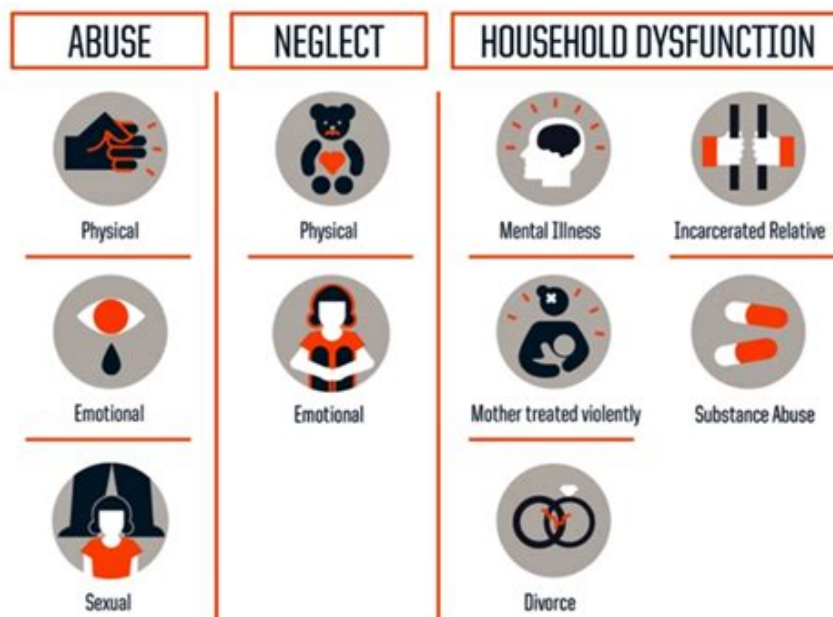
Figure 1 – Showing the 10 types of ACE

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The reasons for most children being taken into care include abuse and/or neglect (63%), chronically inadequate parenting capacity (14%), acute family stress (8%) and absent parenting (7%) (DfE, 2019). These can all be argued to constitute an ACE of one form or another. Given that these factors account for 92% of all children taken into care, a huge majority of CiC have inevitably experienced at least one ACE, with some of them likely to have experienced many more.

3.1.1. *Why are ACEs harmful?*

Boullier and Blair (2018) explain how the 'fight or flight' response of the human body can be seen as an essential part of survival, and vital within genuinely threatening environments. When danger is encountered, the sympathetic nervous system is activated, causing an increase in heart rate and pupil dilation. The stress hormone cortisol is also released, triggering entry of glucose into the blood for use by muscles. Boullier and Blair go on to state that, after such an episode, a period of recovery is often needed to return to normal functioning. However, if such stresses are very frequent, and if protective factors such as a caregiver aren't available, dysregulation of pathways can occur, with long term impacts on the neurological, endocrine and immune systems. Under dysregulation, these three 'allostatic systems' may not return to their original state.

3.1.2. *What are the effects of ACEs?*

Boullier and Blair (2018) summarise the effect of repeated stress events on the three 'allostatic systems' as follows:

- o Neurological –Toxic stress can impact brain development specifically affecting the hippocampus, pre-frontal cortex and amygdala. This can result in behavioural problems, poor executive function and difficulties with concentration, memory and learning.

- o Endocrine – Chronic stress can increase the level of cortisol produced and reduce the variation of cortisol levels which in turn can affect circadian rhythm. Over the long term, resistance to stress hormones, such as cortisol, can develop.

- Immune – Ongoing stress can cause chronic inflammation, which reduces cells' ability to fight infection. Longer term effects of chronic inflammation also include increased risk of cardiovascular disease.

Other research also suggests that toxic stress: can impact brain development (e.g. Anda, Butchart, Felitti, & Brown, 2010); may result in increased anxiety and emotional dysregulation (Newman, 2004); can result in low self-esteem, harmful behaviours and mental and physical health difficulties (Davidson, Devaney & Spratt, 2010).

As the body adapts to frequent stress episodes, it will come to expect future stress episodes, causing an ongoing anticipation of further trauma. This causes heightened alertness at all times and so even times of relative calm become less relaxing (Anda, Butchart, Felitti, & Brown, 2010).

Another biological factor which may exacerbate the problem is within the emerging field of epigenetics. Epigenetics is concerned with how genes within an individual's genetic makeup can be 'switched on' or 'switched off'. Boullier and Blair (2018) outline how repeated exposure to stress can lead to genetic changes known as methylation. This process increases the body's magnitude of response to stress episodes, perhaps because the body is further prioritising the fight or flight response to what is perceived to be an extremely dangerous environment.

If the body is expecting future trauma, is therefore unable to rest and responds to neutral situations with a stress reaction that is further exacerbated by changes to its genetic composition, it is perhaps unsurprising that this cycle can have significant impacts on the individual in question.

3.1.3. ACEs in the long term
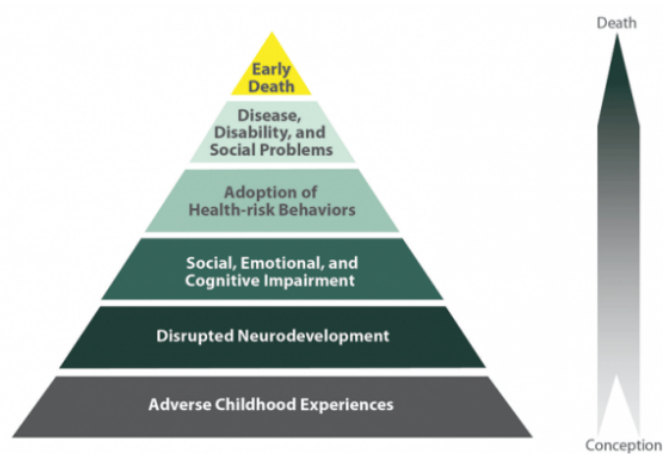
Figure 2 –ACEs and negative health outcomes
(Image retrieved from Mental Health @ Home, 2018)

Bellis, Hughes, Leckenby, Perkins and Lowey (2014) found that, in the longer term, ACEs have been linked to poorer life outcomes, including those related to health, criminal justice, employment and education. Bellis et al. also found a positive correlation suggesting a higher number of ACEs is associated with a higher level of risk. In addition, parents that had been subject to multiple ACEs were increasingly likely to foster an environment within which their own child was exposed to ACEs. Figure 2 shows a possible pathway from experiencing ACEs to negative health outcomes. It should be noted that this pathway doesn't prove causality between ACEs and negative outcomes, but it does provide a seemingly plausible possible thread of causality for future examination.

3.2. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Traumatic experiences are events involving a perceived threat of death or serious injury and intense fear, helplessness or horror (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Some traumatic experiences can result in the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a condition with symptoms including: re-experiencing aspects of the trauma (e.g. nightmares, flashbacks); avoiding any reminders of the trauma; hyper-arousal; and emotional numbing.

3.2.1. CiC and PTSD

With the majority of CiC entering local authority care as a result of abuse and/or neglect and many others due to some form of family inability or stress (DfE, 2019), it would perhaps seem likely that CiC would be over-represented within the cohort experiencing PTSD. With the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.; DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013) definition of 'qualifying' trauma being relatively specific, it could also be argued that many experiences common to CiC could be emotionally traumatic, without being considered sufficient to diagnose PTSD. One example of this could be the process of being removed from a biological family and taken into care, identified by Cairn and Stanway (2004) as potentially leading to symptoms similar to those associated with PTSD.

Despite the arguably clear link between experiencing trauma and requiring local authority care, there is a relatively small number of studies considering PTSD among CiC (Morris, Salkovskis, Adams, Lister & Meiser-Stedman, 2015). Morris et al. also point out that the research that has been done linking PTSD and CiC has often used more general mental health measures, rather than focusing on PTSD specifically.

Estimates of the rate of PTSD among CiC range from 22% (Chambers, Saunders, New, Williams & Stachurska, 2010) to 71% (Sadowski et al., 2003). The higher end of this range is supported by a study suggesting a rate of PTSD 19 times higher among CiC than in the wider population (Ford, Vostanis, Meltzer & Goodman, 2007).

It could be argued the higher rates of PTSD among CiC forms part of the explanation for the significantly higher levels of clinically significant emotional and behavioural problems documented (e.g. Burns et al, 2004; Sawyer, Carbone, Searle & Robinson, 2007). These emotional and behavioural problems increase the likelihood of foster placement breakdown and educational barriers including concentration difficulties, truancy and permanent exclusion (Kerker and Dore, 2006). These external behaviours aren't always interpreted through a trauma-informed lens and may lead to the young person being labelled as 'disruptive' or 'naughty' (Cairns, 2013).

3.2.2. Complex PTSD (CPTSD)

A new distinction is emerging within the literature between PTSD and a condition involving the re-experiencing, avoidance and hypervigilance inherent to PTSD but also including impaired self-organisation, such as affect dysregulation, negative self-concept, and difficulties in relationships (DeJong & Wilkinson, 2019). These impairments must be ongoing and pervasive, causing significant impairment in functioning. CPTSD is considered by some to be a severe variant of PTSD, but others maintain it is a distinct condition (Wolf et al., 2015). Research involving children and adolescents supports the identification of a distinct group with self-organisation impairments in addition to the traditional markers of PTSD (Perkonigg et al., 2016; Sachser, Keller, & Goldbeck, 2017). The consideration of the nature of the PTSD experienced by CiC and the possibility of CPTSD is perhaps an interesting avenue for future research.

3.3. Attachment

Attachment theory is centred around the importance of the relationship between a child and his/her primary caregiver and the influence this relationship can have on the child as he/she grows and develops (Bowlby, 1969). Attachment theory is primarily associated with the work of John Bowlby (1969) who suggested that all infants are inclined to develop relationships with their primary caregivers, and that the quality of that 'attachment' relationship will significantly impact the child's future social and emotional development. Bowlby suggests that a secure attachment is important for optimum emotional and psychological health and development. A secure attachment allows a child to feel safe, trusting that his/her needs will be consistently met, and the caregiver will provide a 'secure base' from which to confidently explore the world.

3.3.1. Attachment styles

Different attachment relationships were categorised into different 'attachment styles' within the 'Strange Situation Procedure' (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Children were observed within different simulated situations (being left alone, left with a stranger and reunited with their caregiver). The three styles identified were secure, insecure avoidant and insecure ambivalent. A fourth attachment style, disorganised, was later suggested by Main and Solomon (1982). The four attachment styles identified can be summarised as:

o Secure – Children feel confident that their caregiver will be available and able to meet their needs. Attachment figures become a safe base from which to explore the wider environment. In times of distress, the child will seek the attachment figure and will be soothed by them (Main & Cassidy, 1988).

o Insecure avoidant – Children with an insecure avoidant attachment are very independent of their attachment figure, both physically and emotionally (Behrens, Hesse & Main, 2007). When distressed the child will not seek contact with the attachment figure. In this scenario the attachment figure is likely to be insensitive and reject the child's needs (Ainsworth et al., 1978), as well as withdrawing and being unavailable during times of emotional distress (Stevenson-Hinde & Verschueren, 2002).

o Insecure ambivalent – When given an inconsistent level of response by their primary caregiver, children can adopt an ambivalent attachment style. The child will commonly be clingy and dependent but may be rejecting of the attachment figure during interactions. The child is hard to soothe and does not feel security from the attachment figure. This also makes it difficult for the child to move away from the attachment figure to explore the environment (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970).

o Disorganised – Categorised later than the other styles, this involves behaviour without a clear and coherent pattern (Schneider, 2014), involving "random fluctuations" of behaviour (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007. p.143). This is often understood as indicating a child is simultaneously frightened of, or on behalf of, someone they also rely on (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2015).

It could be argued that the very presence of children within the care system suggests they may have faced some form of adversity within their childhood years. This may indicate that CiC could be at greater risk of developing insecure attachments, potentially exposing them to some of the negative outcomes associated with such attachments.

3.3.2. *An internal working model*

In addition to being significant in and of their own right, it has also been suggested that early attachments can shape how a child views relationships more generally. Bretherton and

Munholland (1999) suggest that how we engage in interactions, and how we interpret social communication (including, body language, tone of voice etc.), is all influenced by our experiences of our early attachment relationships. This is often called an internal working model. The emphasis on early relationships is supported by research suggesting an internal working model is formed by age 3 (Schore, 2000). This may be especially important for CiC, some of whom will have experienced significant hardship in their earliest years.

3.3.3. *Attachment and education*

Attachment has also been identified as having a significant impact on education (e.g. Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Geddes, 2006), with pupils' attachment relationships with staff and school also considered important (Bergin & Bergin, 2009).

Bergin and Bergin (2009) suggested that attachment styles will influence how pupils develop and maintain relationships with their peers, support staff and teachers. A secure attachment style was associated with feeling safe and secure, which in turn facilitated emotional regulation, classroom exploration and acceptance of challenges. In contrast, insecure attachment styles may increase the likelihood of ongoing difficulty maintaining positive relationships (Perry, 2001; 2002).

When considering how attachment theory relates to education, Geddes (2006) developed a model called the 'learning triangle', which focuses on the relationship between the pupil, the teacher and the learning task.
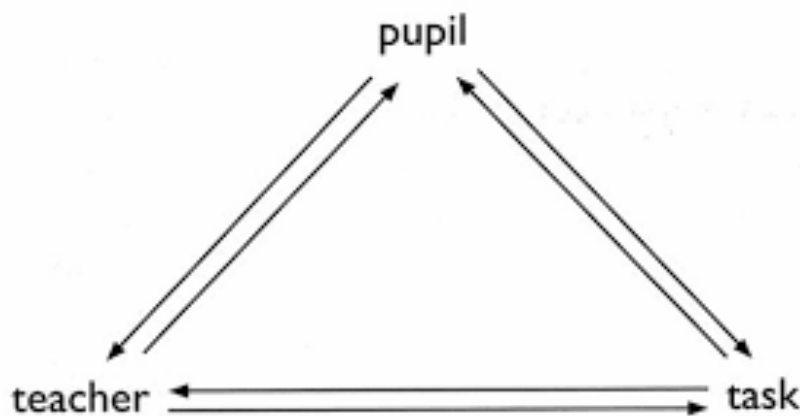
Figure 3 – The Learning Triangle (Geddes, 2006)

Geddes (2006) suggests that relating to the teacher and the learning task in a flexible way allows pupils to manage the challenge of a learning task and the uncertainty of "not knowing something" (p.57). Within a secure attachment relationship, a pupil is more likely to feel able to engage with a learning task and focus despite uncertainty. In contrast, for those with an insecure attachment, feelings of distress and discomfort may inhibit their learning. Although the learning triangle may be considered useful, it could perhaps be argued the visual representation is unclear, implying the pupil relationship with the task is just as important as their relationship with the teacher. However, when viewed as representing the focus of attention rather than the relationship, the learning triangle may represent an ability for children to move attention between the teacher and the task, rather than being fixated on, or fearful of one or the other.

If a teacher has good understanding of attachment theory, possibly through the use of the learning triangle metaphor, he/she could arguably be better equipped to meet the needs of the pupils in the class. Attachment theory can also influence behaviour policy, with Bombèr and Hughes (2013) suggesting that a traditional behaviourist policy based on punishment and reward could exacerbate feelings of relational loss and rejection. Instead Bombèr and Hughes advocate an approach based on the PACE principle, incorporating playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy, as being more useful for promoting positive relationships between pupils and staff.

3.3.4. Is early attachment a fait accompli?

The primary criticism of Bowlby's attachment theory (1969) within recent years has been the huge emphasis placed on the first 3 years, with the theory arguably appearing to completely write off those with difficult early experiences and resulting insecure attachments (Meins, 2017).

Meins (2017) argues that there is no strong evidence that parent-child attachment predicts future outcomes for the child. This supports other research by Booth-LaForce and Roisman (2014) suggesting that early attachment not only fails to predict the vast array of outcomes ascribed it, it doesn't even predict attachments later in life. Meins also questions the tendency within some research to merge the different insecure attachment styles together, pointing out that they are manifested very differently. Indeed, it could be argued that viewing attachment

through a 'secure vs insecure' lens pathologises other attachment styles and may promote a binary 'all or nothing' view of attachment.

Recent research has suggested that, rather than being set in stone from the first 3 years, attachment styles and patterns can develop and change over the course of an entire lifetime (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). Combined with a view among many that attachment theory can be useful for understanding and predicting relational and coping behaviours (e.g. Sochos, 2015; Rana, Moyhuddin & Rana, 2016), this perhaps indicates a need for a model incorporating elements of Bowlby's attachment theory (1969) while recognising the changes future relationships can make.

3.3.5. *The Dynamic Maturational Model (DMM) of Attachment*

The DMM of attachment is an adaptation of attachment theory, developed by Crittenden (2006). Crittenden maintains the importance of primary attachment figures present within Bowlby's theory (1969) but also emphasises genetic predispositions and maturational processes as important factors. The focus on maturation introduces more possibility of change for those with difficult early attachments, as the individual matures and develops over time. Crittenden's DMM theory also views maladaptive behaviours through a more functional lens, seeing them as strategies for coping and protection. This approach therefore potentially changes the young person in question from being seen as 'irrational' or even 'broken' to responding logically to situations interpreted as threatening, based on experiences, maturational development and genetic factors. Through providing positive relational experiences in the future, the DMM suggests individuals can feel sufficiently safe to change their behaviours or move towards a more positive view and expectation of others. Crittenden's theory (2006) arguably provides a more positive and less pathologising approach to attachment, with greater potential for change in the future.

3.4. Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Maslow's (1943) theory combines recognition of physical and practical needs, with psychological needs. The needs included are physiological (including food and water), safety, love and belonging, self-esteem and self-actualisation. Organised in a hierarchy, Maslow suggests higher order needs cannot be met until more basic needs (and thus those lower down the pyramid) have been achieved.
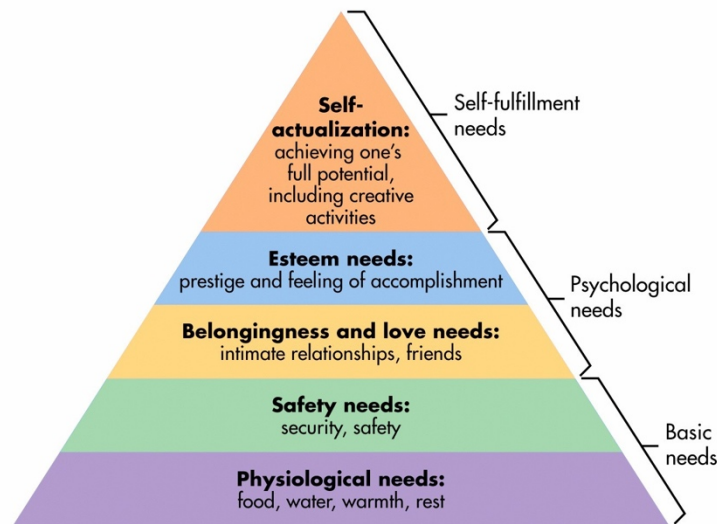
Figure 4 – Illustrating Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943)

(Image retrieved from MarshallMorrisMcsorley, n.d.)

3.4.1. Maslow's hierarchy for CiC

Considering the vast majority of CiC are taken into care as result of some form of abuse, neglect or family dysfunction (DfE, 2019), the chances of CiC being exposed to difficulties within the physiological and/or safety aspects of the hierarchy would appear to be high. If this is the case, Maslow's (1943) theory suggests that the areas of esteem and self-actualisation may be unobtainable without a child feeling safe and having their physiological needs met. This could be significant within an educational setting, with many important social and thinking skills, such as problem solving and respecting others, relying on higher order aspects of the hierarchy. Beyond educational settings, an inability to access the higher levels of the hierarchy could potentially have a significant impact on CiC's ability to form and maintain healthy relationships, as well as potentially reducing employment prospects. Indeed, some of the harmful behaviours more common among CiC (Bellis et al., 2014) could perhaps be linked to limited fulfilment of the esteem needs mentioned within Maslow's hierarchy.

3.5. Social learning theory

Based primarily on the work of Bandura (1977), social learning theory suggests that children develop patterns of belief and behaviour through observing and interacting with others. Given that the majority of CiC are in care as a result of abuse and/or neglect (DfE, 2019), many will have witnessed, and potentially learned from, acts of violence or aggression. Research related to domestic violence has identified a 'cycle of violence' which suggests that children exposed

to domestic violence may develop problematic strategies of problem solving, conflict resolution and communication which they then rely on within their daily interactions (Murrell, Christoff, & Henning, 2007; Rivett, Howarth, & Harold, 2006). Given that children learn within their social context whether violence is acceptable and appropriate or not (Day, Chung, O'Leary, & Carson, 2009), modelling (Bandura, 1977) of violence or aggression by family and community members may increase the likelihood of such behaviours being seen as acceptable or positive. Experiencing violence has also been suggested to promote the development of a model of behaviour that lacks appropriate regulation of negative emotions (Gewirtz and Edleson, 2007). In addition to suggesting that children from more violent homes are likely to develop more violent patterns of behaviour (Murrell et al., 2007), this could also explain what may appear to be disproportionate responses to lower level confrontations, frustrations and disappointments.

Social learning theory provides a potentially useful insight into the worldview that may develop for some CiC, within which behaviours and belief systems, seen by others to be problematic or even damaging, could be normal or positive.

Summary

With over half of CiC being taken into care as a result of neglect or abuse, and with others as a result of some form of acute family stress (DfE, 2019), theory focused on early relationships and experiences would appear to be extremely relevant. Repeated exposure to high stress events can result in constant anticipation of further stressful events and an increased reaction when they occur or are perceived to occur (Bellis et al., 2016). In addition to causing various neurological, endocrine and immunity impairments (Boullier & Blair, 2018), these experiences may often coincide with disrupted relationships with primary attachment figures (Bowlby, 1969). As well as reduced emotional and social understanding, this can also lead to an internal working model which views the world as an unsafe place full of untrustworthy people, and perhaps views the self as the problem (Schore, 2000). Alternatively, witnessing conflict and violence may lead to these behaviours seeming normal or even positive (Bandura, 1977). The knock-on effect of feeling unsafe and not always having basic needs met may be an inability to access higher order skills and needs, such as problem solving and maintaining healthy relationships (Maslow, 1943). This is one way in which the theories of ACEs, attachment, social learning theory and Maslow's hierarchy can

come together to illustrate the wide-ranging effects early experiences can have and the links and overlaps present within the different theories.

Having considered some of the reasons why CiC might be subject to more negative outcomes, attention now turns to exploring pupil voice as one of the potential ways to improve those outcomes as far as is possible. It is noted that engaging with pupil voice cannot eradicate previous experiences or their consequences. It can, however, enable engagement with an individual with the ambition to identify and respond to his/her specific circumstances and needs.

4. Pupil voice and CiC

4.1. Pupil voice

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNRC) states that all children have a right to voice their opinions over all matters affecting them, and to have their opinions taken seriously (UNICEF, 1989). This legally binding international agreement is enshrined in United Kingdom (UK) legislation. Under section 17 of The Children Act 2004, local authorities throughout the UK are expected to ascertain the wishes of children and young people regarding the services they receive.

The case for engaging CYP is not purely within the legislative sphere. Meaningful participation can lead to greater confidence, self-esteem, skills and learning (Jelly, Fuller, & Byers, 2013; Plummer, 2007), and Roffey (2013) argues that interventions implemented through use of control and imposed methods are less likely to be successfully implemented than those with consent.

This accords with Hart's (1992) proposal of a ladder of young people's participation, with the lowest rungs consisting of interactions that either exclude the young person or seek their input in manipulative or tokenistic ways. In contrast, the highest rungs of the ladder, and therefore the most meaningful levels of participation, involve a genuine collaboration between young people and adults, with the young people initiating actions, and the adults supporting them.

Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation

Rung 8: Young people and adults share decision-making

Rung 7: Young people lead and initiate action

Rung 6: Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people

Rung 5: Young people consulted and informed

Rung 4: Young people assigned and informed

Rung 3: Young people tokenized*

Rung 2: Young people are decoration*

Rung 1: Young people are manipulated*

*Note: Hart explains that the last three rungs are *non-participation*

Figure 5 – Illustrating Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation (1992)
(Image retrieved from Blue Sky Funders Forum, 2019)

It is interesting to note that Hart's ladder (1992) has young people's participation higher when working with adults as equals than when young people act without any adult support. It could perhaps be argued that young people are most involved when they control all aspects of the process. However, the image of the adult taking part, and following the initiative of the young person would seem to suggest genuine equality and engagement from both parties.

In considering the key relationship between the parties involved, Earnshaw (2014) compares the role played by adults representing children with politicians representing their constituents. Earnshaw argues that whilst representation from a politician is based on election and can therefore increase empowerment of the voices of the electorate, a young person often has no choice over who represents their voice. This can mean voices of young people are lost, possibly leading to them feeling ignored and disempowered. The risk of disempowerment in this way may be more pronounced for CiC, as they are not only represented by an unchosen 'other', the key figures promoting their views may be doing so in a professional capacity, which could be argued to reduce the vigour with which they advocate for the young person in question.

When applied to the area of child voice, Hart's ladder (1992) would appear to suggest that meaningful participation involves the child's contributions forming a genuine part of the decision-making process, rather than being in any way tokenistic or 'decorative'. In contrast, when both parties take each other seriously, empowering conversations become possible (Grealish, Tai, Hunter, & Morrison, 2013).

Indeed, MacConville (2006) suggests that lack of voice leads to pupils with additional needs becoming passive recipients of specialist services rather than active participants. In contrast, where children with additional needs are active participants, the views they can offer about their own strengths and the way an intervention should be implemented results in better outcomes (Todd, 2003a).

It is not only the young people themselves who may benefit from their voices being heard, however, with Ruddock (2007) arguing that pupil perspectives can have a significant impact on school reform. In addition to this, Earnshaw (2014) suggests even the refusals of children and young people can serve to empower the adults with whom they are interacting. Through refusing to acquiesce to the requests of an adult, a child forces the adult to adopt a different approach and may even remind an adult of their own ability to challenge surrounding societal structures and expectations (Earnshaw, 2014). There may be interesting reflections for EPs in such a concept, with the rejection and failure of strategies and interventions providing potentially important insight into their effectiveness, and opportunities to reflect on their own expectations and practice.

4.2. CiC voice

The arguments for promoting pupil voice outlined above would appear to suggest that the promotion of CiC voice may be equally important as that of the wider population. However, when considering the potential impact of early experiences and the resulting view many CiC may develop of themselves and the world around them, it could be argued that a sense of being heard is even more important for CiC than others.

This suggestion is supported by research by McClung and Gayle (2010) and Dearden (2004), who interviewed 30 and 15 young people in care respectively. Within both studies, being listened to by professionals, including teachers, care staff and parents, was highlighted as significant by

the young people interviewed. Despite this, McClung and Gayle found that only one-third of those interviewed reported being asked about their views of education by their social worker. Social workers were far more likely to ask about views of care than education, perhaps suggesting a view of their role as being 'outside school'. This could be argued to be different from many biological parents, who are perhaps more likely to take an interest in all aspects of a child's life, and may also link with related research suggesting that young people consider themselves more likely to value education if their parents do (e.g. Martin & Jackson, 2002). In another study, Jackson and Martin (1998) reported that children explaining their views of education may refer to comments made by parents 10 or more years earlier, showing the potential impact of parental views over a prolonged period.

Also emerging within studies investigating the views of young people in care was the importance of a sense of control. Jackson and Martin (1998) used standardised measures of participants' locus of control and compared the results for a 'high achieving' group with a control group. The 'high achievers' had a significantly more internal locus of control than the control group. This indicates the high achievers felt far more of their environment and future was within their control. The question should perhaps be asked about causality within these results and whether the control is a cause of the high achievement or a result of it. In this way there may be a sense of circular causality (Dowling, 2003), with greater control promoting application, which increases the likelihood of success and success reaffirming a sense of control. However, regardless of how the positive cycle starts, entry would appear to be beneficial.

Summary

In addition to being an internationally recognised right of all children (UNICEF, 1989), when young people's voice is listened to and taken seriously the most profound forms of participation are available (Hart, 1992) rather than young people being passive recipients (MacConville, 2006). Interventions can become more effective (Roffey, 2013), leading to greater confidence, self-esteem, learning and skills (Plummer, 2007), as well as wider benefits for surrounding individuals and systems (Earnshaw, 2014). The potential value for CiC is highlighted by interview responses from CiC themselves identifying being listened to (McClung & Gayle, 2010; Dearden, 2004) and having some form of control (Jackson & Martin, 1998) as being important to them.

Having considered the advantages of directly engaging with the voice of the child, the next section will explore the role EPs can play in this process.

5. The role of the EP

5.1. In promoting pupil voice

EPs have a critical role in advocating for the empowerment of service users and promoting their ability to voice their own opinions (Greig, Hobbs & Roffey, 2014). Indeed, the guidance from the British Psychological Society (BPS) relating to the ethical standards for practicing psychologists (2009) suggests that EPs have a duty to promote client self-determination throughout their practice. Grieg et al. (2014) argue that pupil voice is relevant across all the different levels that EPs work, from the individual to the strategic. Therefore, every EP should be aiming to develop practice that meaningfully enables young people's voices to be heard (Todd, Hobbs, & Taylor, 2000). Mercieca and Mercieca (2014) agree, adding that "EPs are positioned in a way that makes listening crucial to their role" (p. 24).

With direct questioning the most common method used by EPs for gathering pupil views (Harding & Atkinson 2009), Hobbs, Todd, and Taylor (2000) highlight the difficulties of consulting with children without an ongoing relationship, with one contributor reflecting that EPs "can't ask a question and expect us to tell all" (p. 110). The limitations of a one-off meeting as a means of gathering views (Alderson, 2000), also undermines the ability of the EP to gauge the level of maturity and understanding of the young person involved, which Davie (1991) identifies as being significant.

This lack of relationship can also cause children to doubt the genuineness of attempts to involve them or seek their views (Armstrong, Galloway & Tomlinson, 1993). Children can also often fail to answer as they don't know what to say (Armstrong, 1995). Such concerns support Harding and Atkinson's (2009) view that the best way to listen to children and actively engage them within their education remains an area requiring additional research.

Mercieca and Mercieca (2014) suggest that EPs may decide not to seek the views of the child at all, based on the opinions of those who work closely with them. This may be one example

of EPs being caught in a tension between the adult world and the world of children (Mercieca & Mercieca, 2014).

Once the voice of the young person has been collected, how it is represented within official reports, so the child continues to be involved in the process, is another important consideration (Todd, 2003b). An educational psychology working group report (DfEE, 2000) suggested EPs are well placed to ensure young people's voices are heard and included in plans in a neutral way. In contrast, May (2004) suggests a report of the views of a child will always be limited by the adult interpretation of the child's opinion. Fielding (2004) agrees, commenting the report of what a child has said and the language used are likely to be steeped in the values of the report writer. One solution proposed by a National Children's Bureau report is for reports to include more of the children's actual words, rather than professional paraphrasing (Danso et al., 2003).

For young people to be involved in the process, they also need to be able to understand and access the report, which creates a tension given the various stakeholders for whom the report is written and by whom the report is to be read (Harding & Atkinson 2009). Johal-Smith and Stephenson (2000) suggest the inclusion of a child-friendly report alongside the main version. With the additional time this would require to prepare, those allocating EP resources may need to view it as a high priority for it to become a realistic venture.

EPs would appear to have an important role to play in promoting and representing the voice of the child. However, the limitations within the EP role raise important questions about allocations of time and who EPs are primarily seeking to communicate with as their priority.

5.2. With CiC

In considering the role of EPs with CiC, Jackson and McParlin (2006) suggest CiC are likely to make up a significant proportion of EPs' workload, given the higher number of 'statements' of SEN (27% vs 3% in the wider population). Despite the changes to the education system since their research, it is still the case that CiC have higher rates of SEN than their peers (DfE, 2019), and therefore it is not unreasonable to believe they are still comprising a large part of EPs' workloads. In addition, the view of Burden (1996) that people become EPs in order to 'help children' may increase EP motivation to work with CiC, as they could be perceived to need 'help' more than others.

Whilst there is relatively little research into the effectiveness of EP involvement with CiC, Sinclair, Wilson and Gibbs (2005) identified a positive correlation between EP involvement and placement success.

The role of EPs with CiC can also be limited by external factors, such as the attachment of EPs to specific schools (Jackson & McParlin, 2006). Given the frequent examples of placement breakdown and corresponding school moves (Evans, 2000), EP oversight or involvement may be disrupted. Indeed, McParlin (2001) found that CiC with 'statements' will average 6 or 7 school placements and are therefore likely to be seen by 4 or 5 EPs.

When EPs are able to work to their full potential, their knowledge can allow understanding even of very specific issues faced, such as those of CiC (Thomson, 2007). Research conducted by Sinclair et al. (2005) found that EPs' work with CiC was associated with reduced truancy, absconding and placement breakdown, and was received positively by carers and social workers. This would appear to suggest that EPs can have a significant and beneficial role working with CiC.

Summary

Promoting client self-determination is an important facet of EP practice (BPS, 2009) and with CiC making up a significant proportion of many EPs' workloads (Jackson & McParlin, 2006), the promotion of CiC voice is seemingly a valuable area to consider. EPs' work can be undermined when there are insufficient opportunities to develop a relationship (Armstrong et al., 1993), which can be particularly problematic given the number of placements some CiC experience (Jackson & McParlin, 2006). However, when EPs do work with CiC, they are well placed to record views in an appropriate way (DfEE, 2000) and their work can be associated with reduced truancy, absconding and placement breakdown.

Having considered who CiC are, what they face and why and one possible solution in the form of EPs promoting their voice, the final section of this review will outline the proposed current study.

6. The current study

Given the increasing numbers of CiC (DfE, 2019) and the increased likelihood of negative outcomes, within childhood (DfE, 2019) and later life (Centre for Social Justice, 2015), they are faced with, not to mention the legislative imperative to act (e.g. DfES, 2007), improving outcomes for CiC is arguably a high priority. With government policy and research promoting the role of pupil voice as being valuable (e.g. Roffey, 2013), particularly for CiC (e.g. McClung & Gayle, 2010), and with EPs well placed and possessing useful skills (Sinclair, Wilson, & Gibbs, 2005), it is therefore argued that research into the role of EPs in eliciting and promoting the voice of CiC is of value.

The current study will therefore examine the experiences of EPs when working with CiC, specifically focusing on how they approach eliciting CiC views and how those views are utilised within decision-making processes.

The overarching question to be considered within the research is: What are EPs' experiences of eliciting and promoting the views of CiC? This reflects the three key elements identified within the literature review, namely CiC as a population, pupil voice as a vehicle towards change and EPs as the 'agents of change' given their placement and skillset.

Given the multi-element nature of the key research question, it is therefore broken down into the following sub-questions:

o **What are EPs' experiences of working with CiC?** – This question reflects the limited previous research considering EP experiences of working with CiC and allows for a wider context to the specific thoughts about pupil voice and impact.

o **What are EPs' experiences of collecting the voice of CiC?** – This question is intended to answer half of the overarching research question, incorporating the key elements of EPs, pupil voice and CiC. Given the lack of any previous research specifically addressing this issue, there is a clear knowledge gap for this question to address.

- o **What are EPs' experiences of how those views have been used in decision-making processes?** – Focused around the other half of the overarching question, the issue of promoting the views of CiC and how the views have been used, engages with the practical application and outworkings of the prior elements. This question addresses the "so what" arising from the view collection.

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Educational psychologists' experiences of establishing and promoting pupil voice among children in care.

Part 2 – Major Research Paper

5561 words

1. Abstract

The number of children in care in England is increasing (DfE, 2019) and, despite national (e.g. DfES, 2007) and international (UNICEF, 1989) efforts, children in care experience more negative outcomes than others during their childhood (DfE, 2018) and in later life (e.g. Centre for Social Justice, 2015).

Effective engagement with the voice of young people can lead to interventions being more effective (Roffey, 2013) as well as benefitting the individual (Plummer, 2007) and the people and systems surrounding them (Earnshaw, 2014). Educational psychologists are well placed to promote this practice (DfEE, 2000) and it aligns with their professional responsibilities (BPS, 2009)

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore educational psychologists' experiences of establishing and promoting the views of children in care. Results were analysed using thematic analysis and the 4 identified meta-themes were: Trust, Systems, Emotion and Identity. The findings are discussed in relation to previous research and existing theory. Implications for the role of educational psychologists and possible avenues for future research are identified.

2. Introduction

The numbers of children in care (CiC) continue to increase (DfE, 2019) and although they arguably do not form a homogenous group, the majority are in care due to some form of abuse or neglect (DfE, 2019). The attainment gap to their peers remains (DfE, 2019) and they are less likely to complete primary or secondary school, facing higher rates of exclusion (DfE, 2018). CiC are more likely than others to have special educational needs (SEN; DfE, 2018)), and the role the system plays in ameliorating or exacerbating those needs is unclear (Berridge, 2007). Over the longer term, CiC are more likely to experience a range of negative outcomes, including unemployment, homelessness and mental health issues (Centre for Social Justice, 2015).

With over half of CiC being taken into care as a result of neglect or abuse, and with others as a result of some form of acute family stress (DfE, 2019), theory focused on early relationships and experiences would appear to be extremely relevant. Repeated exposure to high stress events can result in constant anticipation of further similar events and an increased reaction when they occur or are perceived to occur (Bellis et al., 2016). In addition to causing various neurological, endocrine and immunity impairments (Boullier & Blair, 2018), these experiences may often coincide with disrupted relationships with primary attachment figures (Bowlby, 1969). As well as reduced emotional and social understanding, this can also lead to an internal working model which views the world as an unsafe place full of untrustworthy people, perhaps perceiving the problem as being located internally (Schore, 2000). Alternatively, witnessing conflict and violence may lead to these behaviours seeming normal or even positive (Bandura, 1977). The knock-on effect of feeling unsafe, and not always having basic needs met, may be an inability to access higher order skills and needs, such as problem solving and maintaining healthy relationships (Maslow, 1943).

In addition to being an internationally recognised right of all children (UNICEF, 1989), being listened to and taken seriously allows young people the greatest forms of participation (Hart, 1992) rather than young people being passive recipients (MacConville, 2006). Interventions can become more effective (Roffey, 2013), leading to greater confidence, self-esteem, learning and skills (Plummer, 2007), as well as wider benefits for surrounding individuals and systems (Earnshaw, 2014). The potential value for CiC is highlighted by interview responses from CiC themselves identifying being listened to (McClung & Gayle, 2010;

Dearden, 2004) and having some form of control (Jackson & Martin, 1998) as being important to them.

With promoting client self-determination an important facet of EP practice (BPS, 2009) and with CiC making up a significant proportion of many EPs' workloads (Jackson & McParlin, 2006), the promotion of CiC voice is seemingly a valuable area to consider. EPs' work can be undermined when there are insufficient opportunities to develop a relationship (Armstrong, Galloway, & Tomlinson, 1993), which can be particularly problematic given the number of placements some CiC experience (Jackson & McParlin, 2006). However, when EPs do work with CiC, they are well placed to record views in an appropriate way (DfEE, 2000) and their work can be associated with reduced truancy, absconding and placement breakdown.

Given the increasing numbers of CiC (DfE, 2019) and the increased likelihood of negative outcomes, within childhood (DfE, 2019) and later life (Centre for Social Justice, 2015), they are faced with, not to mention the legislative imperative to act (e.g. DfES, 2007), improving outcomes for CiC is arguably a high priority. With government policy and research promoting the role of pupil voice as being valuable (e.g. Roffey, 2013), particularly for CiC (e.g. McClung & Gayle, 2010), and with EPs well placed and possessing useful skills (Sinclair, Wilson, & Gibbs, 2005), it is therefore argued that research into the role of EPs in eliciting and promoting the voice of CiC is of value.

The current study will therefore examine the experiences of EPs when working with CiC, specifically focusing on how they approach eliciting CiC views and how those views are utilised within decision-making processes.

The overarching question to be considered within the research is: What are EPs' experiences of eliciting and promoting the views of CiC? This reflects the three key elements identified within the literature review, namely CiC as a population, pupil voice as a vehicle towards change and EPs as the 'agents of change' given their placement and skillset.

Given the multi-element nature of the key research question, it is therefore broken down into the following sub-questions:

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o **What are EPs' experiences of working with CiC?** – This question reflects the limited previous research considering EP experiences of working with CiC and allows for a wider context to the specific thoughts about pupil voice and impact.

o **What are EPs' experiences of collecting the voice of CiC?** – This question is intended to answer half of the overarching research question, incorporating the key elements of EPs, pupil voice and CiC. Given the lack of any previous research specifically addressing this issue, there is a clear knowledge gap for this question to address.

o **What are EPs' experiences of how those views have been used in decision-making processes?** – Focused around the other half of the overarching question, the issue of promoting the views of CiC and how the views have been used, engages with the practical application and outworkings of the prior elements. This question addresses the "so what" arising from the view collection.

3. Aim of the current study

This research study aimed to explore EPs' experiences of working with CiC, and specifically their experiences relating to the eliciting of CiC views and how those views are used within decision-making processes.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

A qualitative approach was used, in recognition of the experiential nature of the research question and the stance that a quantitative approach may have necessitated imposing structure and direction that narrowed the range of possible responses. Despite criticisms about the inherent subjectivity, a qualitative approach may also have been more able to capture the nuance of the contributions offered than quantitative alternatives.

4.2. Paradigm

The research paradigm adopted for this study was critical realism. Critical realism is composed of ontological realism, asserting there is an objective reality, and epistemological relativism, meaning the objective reality cannot be perfectly known. When summarising this combination of ontology and epistemology, Fletcher (2017) states "Human knowledge captures only a small part of a deeper and vaster reality" (p. 182). Critical realism was adopted in recognition of the subjective nature of the contributions given, as EPs were making sense of their own experiences and therefore reporting events through the 'lens' of their own worldview. A social constructionist approach may also be considered to lessen the objective reality of past experiences some of those in care have been subjected to, as it asserts that truth is socially created (Fletcher, 2017).

4.3. **Participants**

A homogenous purposive sampling method was used to recruit 8 educational psychologists to take part in the research. All participants were employees of local authority educational psychology services, and they represented 4 different local authorities, all within England.

4.3.1. Inclusion/exclusion criteria

Participants were required to meet the following criteria:

- o   Currently employed as an educational psychologist within a local authority educational psychology service
- o   A significant portion (at least 2 days per week) of their work specific to CiC.
- o   In post for at least 6 months

Within the purposive sampling, no information was collected regarding participant age, gender or background and therefore no participants were excluded on any of these bases.

4.4. Measures

The interviews were conducted using the following questions:

- o   What are your experiences of working with children in care?
- o   What are your experiences of eliciting the voice of children in care?

o   What are your experiences of how the voice of children in care has been used within decision-making processes?

These questions were kept as open and broad as possible to allow participant-led, inductive data to be collected. Follow up questions were based on participant contributions and sought to reflect the participant's choice of language, to allow further exploration without imposing researcher bias or interpretation.

4.5. Procedure

Potential participants were identified through a local special interest group related to CiC

Gatekeeper consent was obtained from the respective principal educational psychologists (PEPs, Appendix A)

Participants were given full information about the study (Appendix B) and informed consent was obtained (Appendix C)

Interviews lasting between 50 and 90 minutes were conducted at the participants' place of work

Interviews were voice recorded using Quicktime media software on a password protected computer

Figure 6 – The research procedure

5.   Ethical considerations

Table 3 – Ethical considerations

Ethical issue	Steps taken
Informed consent	Participants were given full information about the study and the use of their data before taking part and all signed to indicate their consent to take part in the study.

Anonymity and confidentiality	All data were stored securely and confidentially using password protected computer equipment until transcription, at which point all identifying information was removed.
Debriefing	All participants were given a debrief after the interview, including contact details should they wish to ask any further questions. Participants were reminded of their right to withdraw up until the point of transcription.
Participant welfare	Participants were not misled or manipulated in any way and were not observed or recorded beyond the agreed interview. Whilst participants were not at risk of harm, it was recognised that the process of reflecting on previous casework could trigger upsetting memories for some. This was monitored, with participants made aware of this possibility prior to obtaining consent, and reminders of right to withdraw or omit questions were given. Any issues raised by staff relating to safeguarding, child protection concerns, or staff conduct would have been reported according to the local authority's policies. No such issues were raised.

6. Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and the resulting transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis following the guidance of Braun and Clarke (2006). An inductive approach

was used within theme generation and coding was not guided by any pre-existing coding framework (Braun & Clark, 2006). This was in order to allow theme generation to reflect the data as faithfully as possible, and limit the impact of researcher preconceptions (Patton, 1990).

The process of analysis was as follows:

1. Familiarisation of the researcher with the data: Transcription, reading and re-reading of the data, noting initial ideas.
2. Generation of initial codes: Systematic coding of the entire data set.
3. Searching for themes: Collating codes into potential themes and gathering supporting data.
4. Review of themes: Including the generation of a thematic map.
5. Definition and naming of themes: Generation of clear definitions and names of themes.
6. Producing the report: Selection of supporting extracts, and final analysis.

(Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.87)

7. Results

The aim of the research was to explore EPs' experiences of establishing and promoting the voice of CiC. A thematic map summarising the meta-themes, themes and sub-themes is presented in Figure 7. A small number of codes have also been included to provide more specific detail with links to two of the sub-themes.

The four identified meta-themes were trust, systems, emotion and identity. Within these meta-themes were 10 themes: established relationships, impact, intention & ability to change, consent, EP role, empathy, challenge, reward, individual identity and group identity.

Each meta-theme will be reported and analysed in turn, with reference to the themes within it.
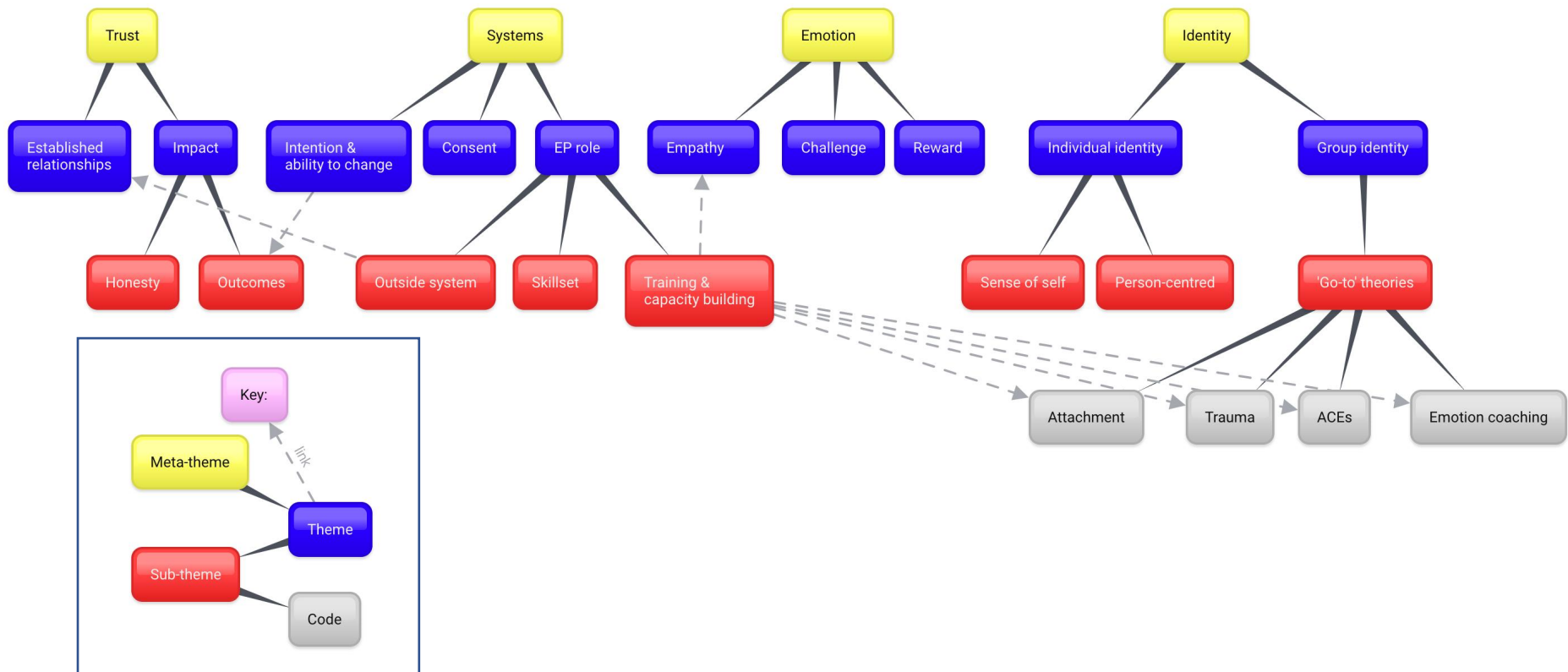
Figure 7 – Thematic map

7.1. Trust

The overarching meta-theme of trust was present within all 8 interviews and was clearly significant for all participants. Within this meta-theme are the themes 'established relationships' and 'impact'. These themes reflect the dual aspect of 'looking back' to the legacy of previous experiences and 'looking forward' to the future expectations shaped by current interactions and experiences.

7.1.1. Established relationships

When reflecting on the best way to promote the voice of CiC, 6 of the 8 participants indicated a preference for someone with an existing positive relationship collecting the views of the young person in question. This raises an important question over whether EPs should be collecting the views of CiC, when perhaps there are other people who are better placed to be able to do it. Participant 5 commented:

> *"Do they need to meet somebody else, that they're probably not going to see again and who's asking them about stuff that's really personal to them?"*

The personal nature of the topics being discussed was mentioned within multiple interviews, with participants wary of the effect on the young person of having to recount often difficult situations and circumstances regularly. Participant 1 in particular was concerned about the risk of "re-triggering and re-traumatising" young people by asking them to speak about early experiences which may include abuse and/or neglect.

Even aside from discussing personal and upsetting details, the number of professionals asking for CiC views was highlighted as an issue. It was recognised that many professionals are collecting views for different purposes and with positive intentions, but participants felt that the seemingly relentless requests for views had made the process less meaningful. One young person participant 5 had attempted to speak to had said:

"I'm sick of being asked my views".

The number of people asking this young person what they thought, had turned what was intended to be a positive activity into a chore and a source of frustration.

7.1.2. Impact

The other key aspect of trust identified within the data was the impact the voice promotion process could have on future trust for the young person. Multiple participants highlighted the need for anyone asking CiC their views to be honest about the likelihood of the young person being given what they ask for. Participant 1 reflected:

"We need to be open and transparent, things might not be radically different".

Participant 4 recounted a young person being willing to share his views but not feeling it would 'do any good':

"I was like 'You know, you're right. I can only pass on what you say, I've got no power in making a change in your circumstances'".

Participant 3 added,

"Most CiC just want to go home".

Participant 8 provided an example of another aspect of honesty valued by participants:

"Tell them how long you will be involved"

This was considered important to avoid misleading the young person into thinking they were likely to see the EP multiple times.

In addition to being honest about how long the involvement might last, and how likely things are to change in the way the young person hopes, another aspect of impact highlighted was the steps EPs take to promote the meaningful use of the views. Participant 7 stated all professionals collecting views should ask themselves,

> *"Is it genuine, person-centred and are you gonna do something about it?"*

If nothing obvious is done with the views, participant 6 outlines one potential outcome:

> *"The more meaningless experiences CiC have with adults, the more you teach them that these encounters don't matter and the more you teach them that relationships don't matter."*

This suggests that not only are EPs constrained by previous devaluation of relationship and 'listening', they may also be at risk of perpetuating the problem.

Participant 5 suggests the most important outcome may be in the process itself rather than what comes from it:

> *"The true value of being listened to and being heard is the most important thing."*

7.2. Systems

The 'systems' meta-theme encompasses the EP role and placement within the system and the complexities and barriers attributed to the system with regards to gaining consent and the possibility of change.

7.2.1. Intention & ability to change

Related to the outcomes that can be achieved through the process, the ability and willingness of systems and people within those systems to adapt and accommodate the will of CiC is a source of frustration to participant 6,

> *"we can't do that, we can't do that, we can't do that"*

With his/her robust response being

> *"well you'll have difficulties then, won't you, because that's what*
> *you need to do".*

Another frustration with the systems in their current condition was highlighted by participant 1, naming a key limitation to meaningful progress:

> *"Dare I say… austerity"*

This appeared to be primarily a comment on the system's ability to change, with limited funding arguably diminishing the potential for change. There could, perhaps also be links with intention to change, either through an interpretation of austerity as a political choice, or perhaps considering the knock-on impact of austerity on the motivation and morale of those working within affected services.

7.2.2. Consent

The specific systemic complication mentioned more than any other was the administrative issue of gaining consent, with Participant 1 highlighting consent as being the most difficult aspect of working with CiC, especially involving cases with shared parental responsibility and special guardianship orders:

> *"It's sometimes more complicated when children are under special*
> *guardianships particularly around if they are continuing to live with*
> *parents as well"*

Although obtaining consent was a frustration at times, Participant 1 was also very clear that it is essential:

> *"We can't do anything until we've got the right system in place, the*
> *right consent"*

7.2.3. EP role

Comments related to the EP role focused on the positioning, skillset and primary activities of EPs. This was located within the systems theme as the contributions offered referred to the positioning of EPs within the surrounding system, the systemic nature of the training and capacity building role being adopted and the supporting skillset of EPs.

Having already highlighted the view of several participants that the 'outsider' nature of the EP in relation to the school makes them less likely to be the ideal candidate for engaging with views, the opposing opinion was also present, with 2 participants stating it was helpful for the EP to have distance from the immediate system. Participant 3 reflected:

> *"The EP as a 'floater' between systems works really well, and makes EPs better placed than teachers, social workers and clinical psychologists."*

The skillset of EPs was viewed positively, with participant 8 highlighting EPs' ability to say

> *"You've told me your dream; we might not get all the way there but let's move towards it".*

This contribution identified the way EPs can encourage CiC to engage sufficiently with their hopes for the future to help identify positive avenues for change without increasing the risk of disappointment and disillusionment by promising the change will be achieved. Participant 8 viewed EPs as being particularly able to achieve this 'balancing' of the ideal and the possible.

Participant 8 feels that EPs' concern and skillset means they often end up 'policing' how views are used, with participant 1 talking about the need to 'escalate' concerns in order to force meaningful engagement. It is perhaps worth noting that the positivity about the skillset of EPs was from EPs themselves rather than impartial observers and

may therefore reflect something about EP confidence in their own skillset in addition to the skillset itself.

In general, participants were seeing their main activities moving towards greater training and capacity building endeavours, with a reducing amount of direct casework. Multiple participants were in favour of this move, with participant 6 commenting:

> *"Any work that we put in should then encourage relationships in school, rather than outsiders going in with, you know, the magic wand, there's no such thing. The ordinary magic, the magic that makes the difference happens every day in the school, not when an outsider comes in."*

Linked to the importance of the established relationships, this view sees the school as the key driver and location of change, and EPs as supporting that process.

The limitations of direct EP involvement were also raised by Participant 1:

> *"Involvement of EPs is often reactive due to funding and prioritisation arrangements"*

This means the early intervention work, that could sometimes be more effective, is less likely to be done when a situation has reached the 'crisis point' of involving the EP.

7.3. Emotion

The 'emotion' meta-theme captures the views expressed regarding the personal impact on EPs of their work with CiC, as well as the personal characteristics required for effective work with CiC.

7.3.1. Empathy

Empathy as a theme was consistently present throughout the interview process, with Participant 5 highlighting how important empathy is for those working with CiC in schools:

> *"I just couldn't believe sat in the meeting how much people minimised some of the experiences that children in care had and didn't think enough about the impact that would be having'"*

Participant 5 aired frustration at the desire for school staff to separate previous trauma from current behaviour. After further reflection Participant 5 suggested:

> *"Professionals often defend themselves by not thinking about how hard their [CiC] life is, or they separate it from behaviour; it's how they cope".*

This suggests something of a 'double-edged sword' related to experiencing empathy. Professionals may be motivated by empathy but may also find empathising deeply a scary and upsetting prospect.

Participant 3 made similar observations about the boundaries to empathy shown by some social workers, saying some appeared to have developed "compassion fatigue" and may be unable to empathise as fully as they may have done previously.

Increasing empathy levels among school staff was one of the aims expressed by participants. While many spoke of it as an aim of training, Participant 5 recounted a desire for a more direct approach in a meeting:

> *"I can remember at one stage just wanting to stand up and throw a bin liner at the deputy head and say you can't go home tonight; you won't be living there anymore. You know just to shock people out of this sort of minimising of this young person's life experiences or the separating of it from what was happening."*

Empathy was also identified as a motivator for EPs to want to work with and around CiC, with Participant 3 summarising:

> *"I think we naturally gravitate towards children whose barometer for social justice is so off kilter".*

7.3.2. Challenge

The theme of challenge was present throughout the interviews, with participants stating their work with CiC was "challenging", often as one of their first reflections. When asked about his/her experiences of working with CiC, Participant 3 replied:

> *"Challenging, I would say. That's the first word that kind of comes to mind, challenging".*

The reasons given why their work with CiC was particularly challenging were predominantly those explored within other themes, including consent, trust and empathy.

7.3.3. Reward

The counterpoint to the challenge observation, 3 participants stated they found their work with CiC to be rewarding. Participant 3 commented:

> *"It's very rewarding, very challenging"*

Participants often linked the reward they felt with their additional concern for CiC being the 'right' thing to do, as summarised by Participant 5:

> *"I think, yeah they should have good stuff happen to them"*

7.4. Identity

A very significant meta-theme, 'identity' and the themes within it were mentioned within every interview, with a variety of opinions about the nature and helpfulness of CiC as a single group and a label.

The 'identity' meta-theme compares and contrasts the approaches used by participants, which were largely person-centred and promoting individual identity, with the more homogenous view of CiC suggested by the limited range of underpinning psychological theory used.

7.4.1. Individual identity

Participant 7 summarised a shared feeling of the value of meaningful promotion of voice for the sense of self of the young person in question:

> *"Things are done to them [CiC], decisions made for them, it's not good for their agency or mental health"*

Participant 3 also offered:

> *"CiC will feel like they haven't had any power in their lives"*

The sub-theme of 'self-concept' is representing a variety of views related to CiC feelings of empowerment, agency, control and self-value expressed by participants.

When reflecting specifically about the methods and approaches used, all participants were emphatic in their preference for individualised, person-centred activities, rather than standardised assessment tools.

Participant 5 stated:

> *"I often use bear cards, or the cards from the multi-element plan, it depends on the situation…I adapt my approach to the response of the young person"*

Participant 3 reported often using:

"Tree of life cards, blob trees, conversation cubes. Rapport is a big thing with CiC".

The views expressed by 3 participants about the use of standardised psychometric tests specifically (referred to in the quotation as 'cognitive assessment') are summarised by participant 1:

"No cognitive assessment, that's way down the end of the line".

The strong preference expressed by participants for the use of person-centred approaches, combined with the ascribed value of promoting the young person's sense of self appears to identify CiC as a collection of diverse individuals, with their unique and specific identities superseding any shared group identity.

7.4.2. Group identity

Group identity formed a significant part of most of the interviews, with many participants asserting that the activities they would use with CiC would be exactly the same as those they would use with other young people. Others were of the opinion that different ways of working were necessary and helpful, with participant 3 suggesting

"CiC can be less verbal and more guarded about what they say".

Participant 1 reflected on being

"Conscious of talking about key adults and early experiences as they could be triggers".

There appeared to be a 'pressure' being felt to affirm the equality of treatment for all children. This 'pressure' was not exerted within the interview but may relate to perceptions of societal views of equality. Participant 2 summarised well, saying:

> "I **should** be saying it's the same for all children". (bold type added to indicate vocal emphasis)

Perhaps this is a reflection of the value placed on person-centred activities and a desire for CiC not to be defined by their early experiences.

A related reservation expressed by some participants was with the use of the term 'children in care' (or equivalent) as a signifier of a homogenous group. Participant 7 was the most vocal opponent of the term, stating:

> "CiC is not a helpful term, it identifies them by where they live. I would prefer young people who have experienced loss, neglect, abuse, family breakdown…"

and

> "The status of being 'in care' is irrelevant, early experiences are relevant"

This distinction could be argued to give greater clarity, but perhaps implies no less homogeneity.

Despite the hesitance some had with the term CiC, and with the idea that practice would be different from others, the key underpinning theories mentioned by participants as shaping their practice were very consistent, with all participants mentioning some combination of attachment, trauma, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), PACE (playfulness, acceptance, compassion and empathy) and emotion coaching. The consistent application of a relatively small selection of theories across work with all CiC would appear to imply a fairly high level of homogeneity within the CiC population.

8. Discussion

The discussion section of this research paper will seek to analyse and further understand the major themes emerging from the results identified. Each meta-theme will be considered in turn, with reference to established theory where applicable.

8.1. Trust

The highly prevalent meta-theme of trust reflected the importance for CiC of building a relationship with an individual before being asked to share their views with them.

This suggests it is important for the young person to feel safe, secure and valued before being able to engage meaningfully in what could be quite an exposing process, depending on the nature of the voice elicited. The need for safety and security first accords significantly with Maslow's hierarchy of need (1943), and its emphasis on people needing their basic needs met before being able to engage with higher order activities.

Echoing the importance of safety and security found in Maslow's hierarchy is the work of Erskine (2013) concerning 'relational needs'. Erskine asserts that individuals need to feel secure in being who they are, without risk of losing respect or affection, in order to fully engage in relational interactions. This is considered to be especially important within a therapeutic relationship, given the increased vulnerability required (Erskine, 2013). Whilst the exploration of views is not necessarily a therapeutic relationship, the potentially personal nature of the subject matter may result in similar feelings of vulnerability.

There would also appear to be links with the 'internal working model' hypothesis (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). The increased importance for CiC to express views within an established and positive relational context may be a reflection of a view of the world which is suspicious of new people until they prove themselves to be

trustworthy. It would perhaps be unsurprising if a child that had experienced adults as unreliable and/or unsafe was additionally wary of new adults.

The other aspect of trust emphasised in the analysis was the need to act in a way which engendered future trust, through honesty and, where possible, seeking outcomes shaped by views. This could be seen as an attempt to change the young person's 'internal working model' (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999), to give young people an experience of being truly heard and valued. This approach accords with Rogers' (1957) view of the key aspects of client-centred therapy. With empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard, Rogers believed every individual has within him/herself the resources for significant positive change.

This concern for future relationship associations also suggests a certain affinity among participants with Meins' (2017) view of attachment as not being a fait accompli, and a rejection of an arguably fatalist binary position viewing early attachment as being fixed and inescapable.

8.2. Systems

Participants expressed frustration at the inflexibility of the relevant systems and the resulting lack of meaningful engagement with CiC views when identifying and implementing strategies. This may be an indication of a relatively closed system, within which change is resisted and influences from outside of the system are contested (Dowling & Osborne, 2018). In addition to the bureaucracy and lack of clarity mentioned relating to consent, this closed nature and desire to maintain homeostasis will limit the potential for change.

The view expressed that working with, and for, CiC is an important part of the EP role (Greig, Hobbs, & Roffey, 2014) and the majority opinion that the work may not involve direct contact between the EP and the young person, echo previous research findings (Mercieca & Mercieca, 2014). The value of the skillset of EPs was also highlighted, which supports the findings of a study commissioned by the association of educational psychologists (AEP), which suggested EPs' work with CiC is enhanced by their training, understanding of psychology and knowledge of child

development and systems (Osborne, Norgate & Traill, 2009). It should be noted that both of these studies rely on EP self-evaluation, which may impact the view of the EP skillset.

8.3. Emotions

One of the most prevalent contributions was the opinion that working with and around CiC was challenging, more challenging than other areas of work participants had experienced. It isn't clear whether most participants chose this area in spite of the challenges or because of them. The counterpoint of the rewarding nature of the work appeared to feed into a sense that working with young people viewed as 'additionally vulnerable' is the 'right' thing to do. It could, therefore, be argued that some EPs may choose to work with and for CiC in pursuit of some sense of benevolent sacrifice, doing the right thing despite the cost.

When considering the motivation for altruistic acts, of which this may perhaps be considered one, Oliner and Oliner (1988) identify two possibilities; empathy and protest. Empathy is based on the individual relating to the persecuted as being similar to him/herself, whereas the protest motive is concerned with being independent of, and against, the surrounding system. Either or both of these motivations could arguably be relevant to EPs working with CiC, with a concern for the welfare of the child caused by relating to them, or a disapproval of the system surrounding the child that has allowed potentially damaging events to occur.

Linked with the desire to promote future trusting relationships, the focus on empathy within participant responses perhaps highlights a view of attachment (Bowlby, 1969) as being dynamic and changeable. This understanding is promoted within the Dynamic Maturational Model (DMM) of Attachment (Crittenden, 2006). In addition to raising the prospect of positive future change, the DMM of attachment interprets maladaptive behaviours as being strategies for coping and protection, rather than condemning them. This appears to align with participants' desire for other professionals and staff to view behaviour through a trauma and attachment informed lens.

8.4. Identity

There was an interesting ambivalence present in participant views related to the identity of CiC, with some participants adamant that CiC should be treated the same as everyone else, with others very clear in their view of CiC as a distinct group with distinct needs, and some changing their view through the course of the interview. This ambivalence was also present in the assessment techniques and underpinning theories adopted. The universal promotion of person-centred, child-led approaches may suggest a high level of variance and individuality, whilst applying a very limited range of theories (e.g. attachment, ACEs) to all cases, could perhaps be viewed as homogenising the CiC group.

The extent to which CiC constitute a homogenous group could perhaps be argued both ways, with the vast majority (92%) having experienced some form of abuse, neglect or family dysfunction (DfE, 2019), and therefore more likely to have experienced ACEs, attachment difficulties and trauma. However, individuals will have experienced different frequencies and intensity of adversity and responded to it differently. Experiences since entering the care system may also be significant, with some believing the system itself is responsible for many of the negative outcomes CiC are at greater risk of (e.g. Winter, 2006).

The ambivalence present is in line with previous research, within which CiC themselves expressed a desire to be treated the same as everyone else and not be singled out, but with additional consideration of their particular circumstances when required (e.g. Honey, Rees, & Griffey, 2011).

9. Implications for EP practice

The current study arguably raises some challenging reflections for EPs to consider within their role with CiC. Whilst not a universal position, the majority view within the research was that EPs should be cautious about engaging in direct voice elicitation with CiC, with a preference given to those with whom the young person already has a relationship of trust.

It may not be within an EP's power to decide exactly how direct or otherwise their role is, but for anyone with sufficient autonomy, the findings would promote a systemic role to support and train those with day to day contact.

There also appear to be significant responsibilities for EPs to embrace and be mindful of when working with CiC. Responses suggested that EPs can have a real influence on the future expectations of that young person, by their trustworthiness expressed through honesty and impact. The other area for responsibility for EPs is in relation to other staff, with participants viewing EPs as having an important role in promoting empathy and understanding of CiC from school staff and other professionals.

It appears likely that not all EPs will be drawn towards the particular challenges of working with CiC, but for those that are, there appears to be an encouragement to be mindful of their own impact on young people in care and those around them.

10. Strengths of the research

The current study was aiming to engage with and explore EP experiences of establishing and promoting CiC voice. There is very little research specifically focusing on EP work with CiC, so it is posited that this constitutes a valuable contribution to the existing research base.

The use of semi-structured interviews, with open and flexible questions allowed participants to express their opinions as they chose, and in so doing avoided researcher-imposed bias and facilitated an inductive approach to data exploration. The length of interviews conducted allowed for a thorough and in-depth discussion of experiences and views, increasing the likelihood of capturing important contributions.

11. Limitations of the research

As a piece of qualitative research, with a relatively small sample size, there are inevitable limitations to the extent to which results can be generalised. It is also acknowledged that, whilst the participants were relatively unrestricted within the interviews, the interpretation of their contributions and generation of themes has the potential to reflect the bias and predispositions of the researcher.

The identification of participants through a local interest group may have resulted in participants who are particularly invested in their role, or perhaps actively engage in reflection as part of it. This could arguably have affected some of their contributions.

12. Future research

Potential avenues for valuable future research have been raised by the current study. These avenues include a further investigation of the most efficient way to elicit CiC voice. With participants reflecting on the number of professionals CiC are asked to speak to, the identification of a system which can effectively gather views and share them would ease the burden on CiC and allow for high quality insight. The need for such a system is documented within the Department for Education (DfE, 2015) special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years, which states:

> "As far as possible, there should be a 'tell us once' approach to
> sharing information during the assessment and planning process so
> that families and young people do not have to repeat the same
> information to different agencies, or different practitioners and
> services within each agency." (p.150)

Although this ambition has been documented, the findings of this study suggests it has not yet been successfully achieved. One possible impediment could be the strength of the language used, with 'as far as possible' and 'should' less definite than the corresponding instructions to seek child views:

> "Local authorities **must** consult the child and the child's parent or
> the young person throughout the process of assessment and
> production of an EHC plan." (p.149, bold type within original
> document)

Investigating why the encouragement to 'tell us once' is seemingly not being implemented successfully could therefore be a valuable subject for further research.

Another interesting possibility might be the development of training packages and toolkits that can be used by EPs or others to equip school staff and other professionals to be able to elicit views in the most effective ways possible.

The extent to which CiC are viewed as forming a homogenous group could also present an interesting and useful avenue for future research, considering EP views in relation to theories and techniques used.

In addition, the emotional workload of consistent work with CiC and the effect it exerts on EPs may present an interesting research possibility, especially given the majority view in this study of work with CiC as being additionally challenging.

13. Conclusions

The current study sought to engage with EPs' experiences of working with CiC, and especially the elicitation and promotion of CiC voice. It is argued this has been achieved, with potentially helpful reflections highlighted for EPs and others working with CiC, and possible avenues for further research.

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Educational Psychologists' experiences of establishing

and promoting pupil voice among children in care.

Part 3 – Major Critical Review

4186 words

1. Introduction

This critical review is composed of three sections. Within the first section the rationale of the thesis will be outlined. This section will focus on why the topic of EPs' work with CiC was chosen and why the study was designed in the way it was.

The second section will consider the contribution the current study offers to the body of knowledge, primarily related to EPs' work with CiC, but other applications will also be considered. This section will briefly consider how the study relates to previous research and its value. Also included will be thoughts about dissemination, in order to make best use of the findings.

The third section will focus on the development of the research practitioner throughout the process of conceiving, carrying out and writing up the research. This section will include some of the challenges faced during the process, as well as further consideration of the ontological and epistemological standpoint.

The review will be written in the first person, in accordance with the reflective nature of the content.

2. Rationale for the thesis

2.1 Identification of research topic

My personal interest in CiC has developed over many years. Having been relatively fortunate within my own family environment growing up, the impact of more

disrupted family settings has always been an area of interest for me. Part of the rationale for my work with children and young people with additional needs has been the additional vulnerability many within the CiC population experience. This additional concern for vulnerability also extends to those who have been subjected to family disruption.

Through casework during my placements as a trainee educational psychologist (TEP), I have worked with CiC, with one case in particular impacting my interest in CiC as a population. During my second-year placement I worked with a young boy who had been taken into care in his early years and was placed with a foster carer.

The details of the abuse the boy had experienced before going into care were shocking. As well as feeling anger and sadness that someone should experience such adversity at no fault of his own, I was amazed at the way the boy was coping with everyday life.

Seeing the progress he had made and was continuing to make caused me to reflect on the significant impact those supporting him were having. I was therefore keen to explore how I could contribute to similar progress in the future.

Having identified CiC as an intriguing population to focus on, my existing interest in personal construct psychology (Kelly, 1955), combined with increased emphasis within government guidance (Department for Education (DfE), 2015) informed my decision to focus on CiC views specifically. My personal interest for the future,

combined with their advantageous positioning and skillset (Sinclair, Wilson, & Gibbs, 2005) made EP experiences and the EP role a logical area of focus.

2.2 Data collection method

In order to allow participants to express themselves freely and without restriction, I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews, with a few broad questions to guide the general focus. This allowed greater scope for exploration of topics not discussed in previous literature (Cohen & Crabtree, 2008). Conducting the interviews in person allowed me to develop greater rapport and trust than using remote methods (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Focus groups were not considered an appropriate method given the personal reflections and sensitive nature of the topics discussed (Morgan, 1996).

3. Contribution to knowledge and dissemination

This section will consider the current study in relation to the existing knowledge base, seeking to identify its contribution and the most suitable dissemination approaches.

3.1 Contribution to knowledge

In order to examine the potential contribution to the knowledge base, I will consider each of the meta-themes identified within the research in turn, before summarising and applying pertinent thoughts.

3.1.1 Trust

The 'trust' meta-theme reflected responses about the importance of the process of collecting views, as opposed to purely focussing on the content of the views gathered. Participants highlighted the value of views being collected by someone with whom the CiC in question has an established relationship. It is perhaps unsurprising that each individual asking for a young person's views is unaware of the multitude of others doing the same, but the result may be a deepening of mistrust, or a trivialising of engagement and relationship. This was reflected in contributions from multiple participants that young people in care often don't want to share their views and open up to new people, based on prior negative or seemingly meaningless experiences, as summarised by participant 5:

> *"Sometimes young people understandably just think 'I haven't met*
> *one person that's helped me so I'm gonna stop meeting people'".*

This suggests that, beyond emphasising the need for engaging young people in care with the decisions made about their lives, the view elicitation process needs to be facilitated and overseen effectively, to promote genuine and meaningful engagement, which doesn't exasperate or embitter the young person. Within my own work, I am always keen to ensure my practice will not result in negative consequences where possible.

The need for a sense of stability and safety in order to share their views appears to echo the priorities within Maslow's hierarchy of need (1943). Whilst this theory is

well established and certainly not new, the current research provides a useful example of a practical application of it.

The other theme within the trust meta-theme focused on the impact EPs can have on the young person through the way they interact. By being honest and genuinely seeking the best outcomes for the individual CiC, EPs can show themselves to be trustworthy. When EPs achieve this, they could be argued to be changing the young person's view of the world, or internal working model (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). The process of reframing a view of adults and professionals away from being untrustworthy and insincere may be beneficial for the young person and those around him/her in the future, in addition to furthering the claims made by some researchers that early attachments don't necessarily determine life chances (Meins, 2017).

3.1.2   Systems

The 'systems' meta-theme encompasses contributions related to the inflexibility of systems, the difficulties of gaining consent and the role of the EP. Whilst the inflexibility of the systems involved may not be a surprise to those working within them, research highlighting the problem may remind those responsible for local authority services of the need for change. As such, even confirmations of existing knowledge can provide fresh impetus and a useful contribution.

Previous research has also highlighted the difficulties faced by EPs when they are unable to form relationships over an extended period of time (Hobbs, Todd, and Taylor, 2000). However, with multiple legislative changes since that research (e.g.

DfES, 2007), it is perhaps valuable to reflect on the continued presence of issues and consider different approaches to resolving them.

It is also worth noting that this research, in line with previous research (Sinclair et al., 2005), has concluded that EPs have valuable skills in this area. Whilst this may be the case, it is based on EP self-reporting, which needs to be held in mind.

3.1.3 Emotion

Within the 'emotion' meta-theme, a major focus was the challenging nature of work with CiC. Given the attachment difficulties (Bowlby, 1969) faced by many young people in care, it is expected that additional challenges will be present. With so little previous research examining EP experiences of working with CiC, limited consideration has been given to the impact the work can have on the EPs themselves. The insight provided into the challenging nature of the work and the reward that keeps people wanting to do it are furthering the understanding of the role.

One of the particularly useful contributions of this research is the engagement with the empathy shown by professionals towards CiC, including the emerging concept of 'compassion fatigue' and emotional self-protection. This is an important avenue for future research to be able to better support professionals and equip them to have the most positive impact they can. The role of supervision may be a helpful focus within future research in this area.

3.1.4 Identity

Participants were unanimous and emphatic in their preference for person-centred approaches when working with CiC, and many were keen to highlight how the self-concept of young people in care can benefit from the process of 'being heard'. This perhaps suggests a view of CiC as being varied and heterogenous. However, participants were also unanimous in their use of, and reference to, a specific set of underpinning theories, including attachment, trauma, ACEs and emotion coaching. The use of a small and consistent range of theories and techniques may imply a more homogenous identity.

With one of those preferences seemingly promoting a view of CiC as a collection of individuals and the other suggesting they form a more homogenous group; the research raises pertinent questions about the extent to which the CiC grouping and label is accurate and helpful.

Further research could expand and elucidate these seemingly contrasting opinions, to better understand them, and to examine the interaction with the desire for a 'positive experience' expressed by participants. It could be argued that the CiC population is over-homogenised in other ways, with Meins (2017) highlighting the categorisation of children simply into secure and insecure attachment styles, pointing out that insecure attachment styles can vary considerably.

3.2 Dissemination

Given the lack of previous research specifically focusing on how EPs gather and promote the views of CiC, it is arguably important to consider how the research can best be used to further the knowledge base and inform future practice.

The most obvious avenue for dissemination would be to seek to inform future practice of EPs through attempting to publish within one of the journals EPs are most likely to read, such as Educational Psychology in Practice. I would contend there is value in EPs considering the reflections outlined and taking the opportunity to consider their own practice in response. This would be primarily the case for those working with CiC, which may extend to the majority of EPs in some capacity (Jackson & McParlin, 2006) but there could be useful impacts for any EP, irrespective of whether their work is with CiC or others.

However, the value of the research is not simply in EPs reading about other EPs and considering their own practice, as valuable as that might be. The meta-themes and themes relating to trust and impact when working with CiC, and the empathy that participants saw as being so vital, provide any professionals and school staff working with CiC potential food for thought. With this in mind, publications related to teaching, social work or other professions such as speech and language therapy could be useful dissemination avenues to explore.

Local and national government policy should arguably also be shaped by research, and whether it occurs as a direct result of this research or not, there would appear to be a significant need for further dialogue and systemic change around the number of

professionals asking for CiC views regularly and in tokenistic ways. When young people are becoming 'sick' of being asked their views it appears that a positive and powerful activity has become ineffective and arduous. In addition to seeking publication, there may be scope for presentations to be made to figures within local authority services, to aid them in their strategy development. Part of this conversation may focus on the role supervision can play in the support of professionals, to allow them to maintain empathy without compromising their own wellbeing.

4. Critical account of the development of the research practitioner.

This section will focus on the effect the research process has had on me as a researcher. One of the obstacles to the research will be explored, along with the development of the ontological and epistemological positions and implications for my future practice as an EP.

4.1 Change in the research design

One of the most significant moments within the research process involved changing the design of the study. Having intended to use interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), I had been reflecting on the nature of IPA and the data I had collected to that point. I had considered the idiographic nature of IPA (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) and was happy that my participants were sufficiently homogenous to satisfy this requirement. However, when considering the data I had collected, and the way the interviews had gone, I became unconvinced that the reflections offered by participants constituted a truly 'lived' experience (Smith et al., 2009). As the EPs

taking part had been engaging with CiC within a professional capacity, their experiences, whilst completely valid and useful, didn't seem as 'lived' as if I was interviewing foster carers or CiC themselves. I therefore made the decision to change the research design away from using IPA as a framework for analysing my data and decided to use thematic analysis instead. The flexibility of thematic analysis meant I could maintain a latent element to my engagement with the data whilst considering the interview responses as reflections, including experiences, which better suited the data collected.

The decision to change analysis method was made relatively late in the process, and involved me arranging further interviews, making it a more complicated choice. However, having elected to make the change, I am confident it was the correct decision and I have ended up with a stronger piece of research as a result.

There was also an opportunity for reflection as a researcher. Initially I was frustrated that I hadn't made the change earlier, but on further consideration, I realised I needed to collect some data and enter into the interview process before being able to fully engage with the nature of the data and make an informed decision. In this case it was important to make the most appropriate judgement at that specific moment in time.

4.2 Ontology and epistemology

Linked to the change in the research design, I have also been on a journey in terms of the ontological and epistemological position adopted within the research. More specifically, I have been considering the extent to which a paradigm should be

bespoke to the research project and separate from the ontological and epistemological standpoint of the researcher's own worldview.

At the inception of the project, I adopted a constructionist stance, in recognition of the subjectivity inherent within the experiences of an individual. This was a pragmatic decision based on the nature of the data I was intending to collect and the most appropriate form of analysis.

Pragmatism promotes the prioritisation of finding solutions to key change issues over an adherence to a given ontological or epistemological position (Burnham, 2013). Whatever methodological or philosophical approach is most advantageous within a specific research context, and for a given research problem, is therefore adopted (Robson, 2011). The subjective and experiential nature of the data appeared to fit well with a social constructionist paradigm.

However, Marsh and Furlong (2002) argue that the personal views of the researcher should inform research decisions, and cannot be separate from them:

> *"Researchers cannot adopt one position at one time for one project*
> *and another on another occasion for a different project. These*
> *positions are not interchangeable because they reflect fundamental*
> *different approaches to what social science is and how we do it.*
> *This is a key point…a researcher's epistemological position is*
> *reflected in what is studied, how it is studied and the status the*
> *researcher gives to their findings". (p. 21)*

This argument resonated with me, especially the logical flow from the personal view of the researcher, to their chosen area of research and the resulting method of data collection and analysis. That isn't to assert that a researcher's position has to be fixed and unchangeable, or that researchers can't have different views in different settings. However, I would contend that the fundamentals of how knowledge exists and is accessed have to be significant in shaping an approach to research.

I have since decided that I was adopting a social constructionist methodology to fit the methods, when the foundational nature of any methodology meant that should perhaps have been decided first, with the methods flowing out from the decisions made. This realisation came at a similar time to the decision to change from IPA to thematic analysis, meaning I moved from a social constructionist IPA, briefly to a critical realist IPA, before settling on a critical realist thematic analysis. The following sections will engage with the justification for adopting a critical realist position.

4.2.1 Ontology

Ontology is the study of 'being', the study of reality, of what is real and whether that reality exists independent of the person observing it (Marsh & Furlong, 2002). Marsh and Furlong's (2002) observations of the key distinctions within ontology are as follows:

- o Ontological realists contend there is objective reality and absolute truth, meaning some things are true and real, regardless of whether they are observed and how they are interpreted.
- o Ontological relativists, on the other hand, view reality as being subjective, and rather than being 'discovered', reality and truth are 'constructed' through individual or social means. Therefore, there is no 'reality' outside of those who are observing and interpreting it.

Social constructionism views reality as being 'co-constructed' and, as Gameson and Rhydderch (2008) state, individuals are likely to "construct many different, sometimes conflicting, but equally convincing 'truths' or 'realities', all of which may be accepted as appropriate, relevant and valid". (p. 101)

As an individual, I view ontological realism as more logical and credible than relativism. If the existence of something is dependent on someone's interpretation of it, then we must surely assume that those processes which we observe now within the natural world, such as births and deaths, haven't been occurring throughout history, but in fact have only occurred since they have been observed and 'given meaning'. There is also an extent to which scientific discoveries take on an entirely different meaning within a relativist ontology. When the majority opinion was that the earth was flat, we would surely have to conclude that society had constructed the earth as being flat. Upon the discovery that it was spherical, those constructions changed, but the earth hadn't changed shape, people had simply furthered their own understanding.

I also had misgivings about relativism within this specific research project. If many different 'truths' can exist and conflict, whilst all being valid and appropriate, what are the implications of that belief for children and young people who have been brought into the care system as a result of abuse? Although their accounts of events are accepted as true and valid, so must be the accounts of the abuser, potentially arguing the abuse didn't happen or wasn't a problem. With no outside 'reality' to act as an arbiter, we must surely view all constructions of reality as being equally true.

There is arguably also a theoretical problem with any overarching assertion of 'no truth' as is the case within relativism. If it is always true that there is no objective truth, that presumably must become an objective truth, undermining the claim. Alternatively, if the 'no truth' claim is a relative one, then for some people objective truth does exist, which surely cannot co-exist with relativism. This issue of internal consistency may not be convincing to some, but it would appear to raise some interesting complications.

One of the strengths of social constructionism would appear to be the gravity it gives to the opinions and lived experiences of individuals. I would, however, contend that views and experiences can be taken seriously without embracing a relativist viewpoint.

It should also be noted that within ontological realism, there is still room for issues of opinion, for example whether something tastes nice, that is a subjective judgement of an individual, and their view can neither be considered true nor false, it is simply an opinion.

Having clearly adopted a realist ontology, the next consideration was my epistemological position as an individual and a researcher.

4.2.2   Epistemology

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge and, having established an ontological position about the nature of reality, a researcher's epistemological position will determine how they think the reality can be accessed and understood (Marsh & Furlong, 2002). Marsh and Furlong (2002) explain epistemological positions as follows:

- A realist or positivist epistemology views all things that are real as being observable. All things, including social phenomena are observable and potentially replicable.
- A relativist, interpretist or hermeneutic epistemology views some social phenomena as being real but not observable.

Given my adoption of a realist ontology, the overall paradigms available are therefore positivism or critical realism.

4.2.3   Positivism

Positivism seeks to identify causal relationships through direct observation, and suggests that, given the correct conditions, results would be consistent and predictable (Marsh & Furlong, 2002). Hollis and Smith (1990) capture the related 'empiricist' approach as follows:

"To detect the regularities in nature, propose a generalisation,

deduce what it implies for the next case and observe whether the

prediction succeeds. If it does, no consequent action is needed; if it

does not, then either discard the generalisation or amend it." (p. 50)

Marsh and Furlong (2002) view this classic 'scientific method' as having shaped the

positivist approach to research. Positivism combines a realist ontology and

epistemology. Marsh and Furlong also identify a conflation of positivism and

[critical] realism within the Hollis and Smith (1990) approach.

4.2.4   Critical realism

Critical realism, in contrast with positivism, combines a realist ontology with a

relativist epistemology. In summarising the ontological/epistemological combination,

Fletcher (2017) states "Human knowledge captures only a small part of a deeper and

vaster reality" (p. 182). In critical realism, reality is stratified in 3 levels, as shown in
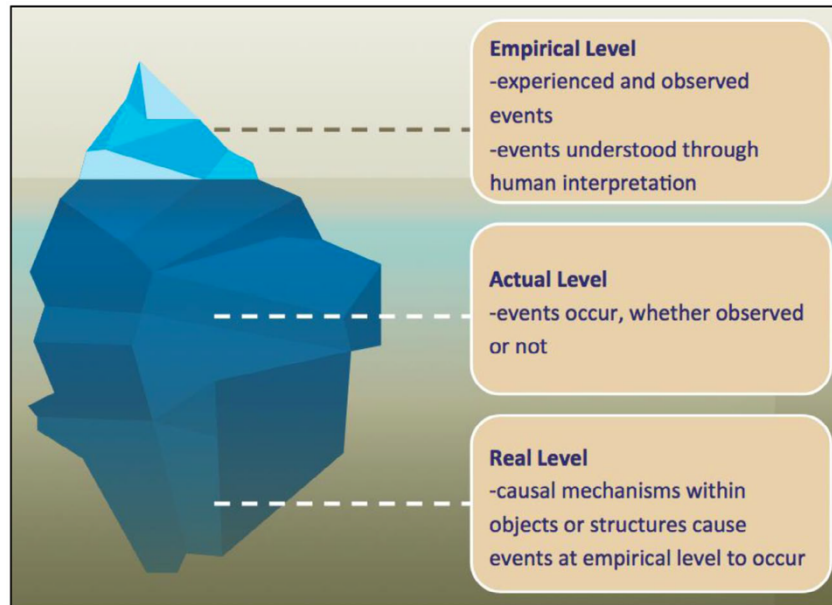
Figure 8.

Figure 8 – Levels of reality in critical realism (Fletcher, 2017)

These levels have been helpful in shaping my understanding of critical realism and, specifically, the differences between critical realism and positivism. One key difference appears to be the assertion that things can occur and be true without being observable. This aspect distinguishes critical realism from both positivism, which states reality is absolute and observable, and social constructionism, which states that reality is created through observation and interpretation (Fletcher, 2017).

5. Impact on future practice

The process of engaging with research and statistics, as well as carrying out the study, has caused me to reflect on my future practice as an EP. I had thought in the past about work with vulnerable groups more generally and that is undoubtedly one of the

factors that led me to pursue a career as an EP. My thoughts about CiC specifically have been more recent, but it has only been during the research process that I have engaged with the practicalities of how I would want to work with CiC and whether it would be effective. I hadn't given sufficient thought to the number of professionals CiC have to engage with and the impact of repeatedly interacting with new people, concerning potentially very difficult and upsetting subject matters.

My desire to work with CiC in the future has been strengthened by the research process, as I am increasingly convinced that CiC are an additionally vulnerable group and if I am able to contribute to better outcomes for some I would like to. As well as an increased desire to work with CiC, I am also more convinced that the most important consideration when conceptualising involvement is the interests of the young person in question. Whilst avoiding overgeneralising the results of the study, I have reflected on my need to consider how I could involve others within the voice gathering process. More broadly, I have reflected on the secondary impacts of activities such as gathering views or performing assessment tasks. Consideration for how I approach all interactions with young people and those around them will be higher on my priority list than it was previously.

As a researcher, I have also been impacted by the conviction that the fundamental ontological and epistemological positions adopted in a given research project should be approximately aligned to those of the researcher, to allow for coherent and consistent approaches to truth, knowledge and how both can be engaged with.

6. Researcher reflections on the research process

The research process has felt like a rollercoaster at times, sometimes in terms of highs and lows, but primarily in terms of productivity, with bursts of productive time interspersed with periods of little progress. For a large part of the process, the research has felt like a shadowy figure looming over me as I have been attending to other priorities. That being said, there have been aspects of the research process I have really enjoyed. Whilst arranging the interviews wasn't, conducting the interviews themselves was very enjoyable, I found them all interesting and worthwhile. I also enjoyed engaging with areas of research, especially around some of the biological aspects of trauma.

I am increasingly convinced that my future career direction will not include huge amounts of research and I'm absolutely certain a research only role would not be for me. I also, however, recognise the value in the research process, and it has taught me many valuable skills in relation to work prioritisation, perseverance and organisation. In addition, given the need I see for EPs to bring people with very different narratives together, thinking more deeply about my ontological and epistemological position should equip me to better be able to relate to differing viewpoints, with the intention of creating shared understandings.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Gatekeeper consent letter

Appendix B – Participant information sheet

Appendix C – Consent form

Appendix D – Debrief form

Appendix E – Interview questions

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Appendix G – Example interview transcript

Appendix H – Example data coding & theme generation

Appendix A - Gatekeeper consent letter

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a trainee educational psychologist studying within the psychology department at Cardiff University. As part of my course I am seeking to conduct research into the best ways for educational psychologists (EPs) to collect and promote the views of children in care.

Through interviewing EPs who work with children in care, the aim of the project would be to establish what techniques and skills they see as being most effective in eliciting and promoting the views of the children. Ultimately, the project will seek to develop a framework or tool to share best practice and equip EPs for future work with children in care.

As you have one or more specialist EPs working with children in care, I would be very interested in collecting their views and reflections. I would be very grateful if you would consent to your staff member taking part in our research.

Participation will involve completing an interview, which will take approximately 60 minutes. The interview can take place within the service and can be arranged at a convenient time.

To indicate your consent for participation from your staff, or for further information, please email me (donaldsona@cardiff.ac.uk) or to speak with my research supervisor, Dr. Rachael Hayes, please email (hayesr4@cardiff.ac.uk)

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request, I would be very grateful for your support.

With kind regards,

Andy Donaldson

Appendix B - Participant information sheet

Research Title
Educational Psychologists' experiences of establishing and promoting pupil voice among children in care.

Invitation
You are invited to participate in this research project. Before deciding whether to take part please take time to read the following information, ask any questions you may have and discuss any aspects of the research you may be unsure of. Thank you for reading this information sheet.

What is the project's purpose?
This research aims to investigate the best ways of collecting the views of children in care by gathering the opinions of EPs who work with them. It is hoped the research will further inform the development of a framework to guide EPs in the future and share best practice.

Why have I been chosen?
You have been chosen to take part in the research because you are an educational psychologist employed by a local authority, with part of your role focusing on working with children in care, and you have been in post for at least 6 months.

Do you I have to take part?
No. Participation is voluntary, and you can decide whether to take part and whether to withdraw at any point. If you do decide to take part your data will be collected and then anonymised. Once anonymised, data cannot be withdrawn since data will not be identifiable. Choosing not to participate or choosing to withdraw will not result in any negative consequences.

What will happen to me if I take part?
You will be asked to take part in an interview which we estimate will take approximately 60 minutes.

What do I have to do?
Please answer the questions in the interview as fully as possible. You do not have to answer all questions if you do not wish to. Please do not name children or colleagues during the interview.

What are the possible risks of taking part?
There are no identified risks involved with taking part in this research. During the interview you will be encouraged to reflect on your experiences of working with children in care. If reflecting on how you have gathered views in the past reminds you of upsetting case details, please feel free to pause the interview at any point to take a break. Alternatively, if you would rather not reflect on certain cases please feel free to omit those cases from your responses. You can withdraw for any reason before, during or after participation (within a 1 week period).

What are the benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits in taking part, it is hoped the research will contribute to effective EP work with children in care and will therefore benefit EPs and children in the future.

What happens if something goes wrong?
If you have any questions or complaints about the research, please contact a member of the research team (contact details below)

Will my contributions be confidential?
All data will be collected and stored confidentially and securely for a period of one week, and then transcribed and anonymised. Once it has been anonymised there will be nothing to identify you or your institution from the data you provide.Data may be shared and analysed in an anonymised form to allow reuse by the research team and third parties. This data collected from the interview will not allow institutions or individuals to be identified.

What happens to the results of the project?
The results of the project will be analysed and a written report produced. The data may be stored anonymously for an indefinite period. If you would like further information about the outcomes of the project, please feel free to contact a member of the research team. It is possible that the results of the research will be used in a publication, but all information used then would be anonymous.

Who is organising the research?
The research is organised by a doctoral student from Cardiff University, as part of his doctoral studies.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?
This project has been reviewed and approved by the psychology department ethics review board at Cardiff University.

Contacts for further information.
Andy Donaldson (donaldsona@cardiff.ac.uk)
Dr. Rachael Hayes (Supervisor) (hayesr4@cardiff.ac.uk)
Both contactable at: Cardiff University, Tower Building, Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AT

Cardiff University Psychology Ethics Committee – psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk
If you have any concerns about this research project, please contact the Cardiff University School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee, Cardiff University, Tower Building, Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AT

The data controller is Cardiff University and the Data Protection Officer is Matt Cooper (CooperM1@cardiff.ac.uk). The lawful basis for the processing of the data you provide is consent.

Appendix C - Consent form

Study title: Educational Psychologists' experiences of establishing and promoting pupil voice among children in care.

Please read each of the following statements carefully and tick to indicate your agreement.

Statement	Tick here if you agree
I understand that my participation in this project will involve completing an interview about collecting and promoting the views of children in care. The interview should take no more than 60 minutes.	
I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time before the data is anonymised (1 week after interview), without giving a reason. I can decline to answer any questions I am asked.	
I understand that the interview will involve reflecting on previous work with children in care and that may involve reminders of difficult cases or situations. I can pause the interview at any point, withdraw from participation or decline to answer specific questions or comment on specific cases without giving any further explanation.	
I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time. I am free to withdraw or discuss my concerns with Dr. Rachael Hayes, project supervisor at Cardiff University.	
I understand that the information provided by me will be held securely (password protected) for a period of one week until it is transcribed, at which point it will become anonymous.	
I also understand that at the end of the study I will be provided with additional information and feedback about the purpose of the study.	

If you agree to all of the above statements, please complete the declaration below.

I, _____(NAME) consent to participate in the study conducted by Andy Donaldson, School of Psychology, Cardiff University with the supervision of Dr. Rachael Hayes.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

The data controller is Cardiff University and the Data Protection Officer is Matt Cooper (CooperM1@cardiff.ac.uk). The lawful basis for the processing of the data you provide is consent.

If you have any concerns about this research project, please contact the Cardiff University School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee, Cardiff University, Tower Building, Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AT (psychethics@caridff.ac.uk).

Appendix D - Debrief form

Thank you for participating in my study. Here is some information about the research I am undertaking

Title: Educational Psychologists' experiences of establishing and promoting pupil voice among children in care.

About the study: This study is investigating the ways EPs collect and promote the views of children in care. Participants have completed an interview to explore their experiences of working with children in care, and to ascertain what has been effective.

Use of data: The data collected will be used to identify effective ways of collecting the views of children in care, and to identify ways in which those views can better be included within decision-making processes.

Confidentiality: Your information will be stored confidentially and securely for a period of one week, before being anonymised. After this, information provided cannot be traced back to individuals. This means that data cannot be removed from the dataset, so withdrawal from the process is not possible after anonymisation.

	Researcher: Andy Donaldson	Supervisor: Dr. Rachael Hayes
Address	School of Psychology, Cardiff University Tower Building Park Place Cardiff	School of Psychology, Cardiff University Tower Building Park Place Cardiff
Post code	CF10 3AT	CF10 3AT
Position	Postgraduate student	Research supervisor
Email address	DonaldsonA@cardiff.ac.uk	hayesr4@cardiff.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about this research project, please contact the Cardiff University Psychology Ethics Committee, psychethics@caridff.ac.uk

Appendix E - Interview questions

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- o What are your experiences of working with CiC?

- o What are your experiences of collecting the voice of CiC?

- o What are your experiences of how those views have been used in decision-

  making processes?

These questions were developed when IPA was the intended method of analysis, with that contributing to the experiential focus of the questions. When the decision was taken to move to thematic analysis, there was potential to change the interview questions. However, in order to include the interviews that had already taken place and in recognition of the interview questions remaining appropriate for the adapted study design, the questions were maintained, with only the analysis changing.

Follow up questions were also used to clarify and further explore contributions.

Appendix F – Personal data research form

Researcher responsible for the data: Andy Donaldson

Research project name or SREC code: Educational Psychologists' experiences of
establishing and promoting pupil voice among
children in care.

Date: 25/02/2018

Description of personal data held or processed. Provide a narrative description of what the data are.	Data held will consist of name of participant and local authority within which the participant works.
Information that is being held or processed. Indicate the nature of the data: how could the person be identified and what information is stored alongside that identity.	The participant's name and employer's name will be held alongside a recording of their views of how best to elicit and promote the views of children in care.
When is data collection likely to begin and be completed?	It is anticipated data collection will start in March 2019 and will be completed by January 2020
Number of individuals for whom information will be held.	Approximately 6 participants are expected to take part
Lawful basis for processing. This will probably be 'Public Interest' or 'Consent'.	Consent
Does the data include special category data (or Criminal offence data)? Special categories include: race, ethnicity, politics, religion, trade union membership, genetics, biometrics, health, sex life or sexual orientation. If yes then is specific consent used to process this information?	No
Length of time personal data will be kept. Personal data should only be kept for as long as necessary. Research data should be anonymised as soon as possible and the length of time before this happens should be communicated to the participant.	Personal data will be held from the time of the interview for one week to allow transcription. As soon as the interviews have been completed and transcribed, identifying data will be destroyed and content will then be held anonymously
What are the data security procedures? Ensure all personal data is kept secure.	All personal data will be stored on password protected computers and transferred using encrypted USBs
List CU (Cardiff University) staff who have access to the personal data.	None
Indicate whether all people listed above have completed their mandatory information security training. Available here: https://intranet.cardiff.ac.uk/staff/news/view/211993-information-security-training-when-will-you-complete-yours	
List CU students who have access to the personal data.	I will be the only one with access to the data
What guidance or training have/will the students receive concerning data security?	I have received guidance from university tutors, and have received data security training and guidance within previous employment roles.
List people external to CU who have access to the personal data. Provide their affiliation	None
What agreements are in place for data security outside of CU?	n/a
Justification for not anonymising these data. Explain why the data are not or cannot be anonymised.	To allow participants to withdraw from the process if they wish to, and remove their data up to the point of anonymisation

Interview 5 transcript

[00:03:43.840] Interviewer (start)
So tell me about a bit about your experiences of working with children in care.

[00:03:50.650]
 I had quite a lot of experience working with children in care before I took the role on. And that is why I wanted to do the role in the first place and I think it's I think what I felt was that whilst it's very challenging area of work um I struggle to think of one that I think is more important and I guess I really think that for the young people that have had a very difficult start in life and have been separated from the carers that actually they need they do need a high level of support. They are a vulnerable group and you know all the all the research indicates all the ways in which they are.

[00:04:29.370]
But I guess when you're working with young people um you're not thinking about that necessarily. But I've just always found the people themselves to be really rewarding to work with just yeah just like super kids all the time just like wanting to find the fun wanting to you know have good stuff happen to them. And I think yeah they should have good stuff happen to them. So I think for those reasons I wanted to go into the role and then I guess what I wanted is I felt, I probably shouldn't say this cos you're in training but. I was getting to the stage with the current role thinking it'a all very well.

[00:05:13.560]
Me seeing each young person and writing a report but actually um I really want to get somewhere where we can make do a bit more and make more of a difference because I think the power of the report is whoever reads it whether they're going to put those things in place or not. And actually the role of the camp and the virtual school working with children in care was about supporting whole school settings to understand the needs of this group. And my experience working on a one to one basis was that actually a lot of people just didn't just didn't think about it enough and didn't think about what the impact would be.

[00:05:48.220]
I can remember a massive meeting at a secondary school and we were doing every child. It was the Every Child Matters agenda. And so I've set up this meeting feel sick when I think about it but I decided to do it around the every child matters outcomes. And we were sat in a big square and I'd managed, I don't know how I'd done it. I'd managed to get like the deputy head there. There was loads of us that was the foster carers and loads of staff from school outside agencies and we were trying to go through each of the what we wanted for this young person who was having an awful time.

[00:06:24.130]
It was so surprising that people just just couldn't believe sat in the meeting how much people minimised some of the experiences that children in care had. and Didn't think enough about the impact that would be having I can remember at one stage just wanting to stand up and say throw a bin liner at the deputy head and say you can't go home tonight. You won't be living

there anymore. You know just to shock people out of this sort of minimising of this young person's life experiences or the separating of it from what was happening. So yeah. Oh yeah.

[00:06:58.580]
Yeah. Yeah I think we know that he's experienced all those things but what he's doing in school and how he's behaving is this. and that kind of separation

[00:07:06.410] Interviewer
not joining the two.

[00:07:07.160]
 Yeah. Which just maybe. I just yeah I've often felt quite frustrated so I've always wanted to work with children in care because I felt that there is just so much more that people need to understand about it and need to think more about. Or and also people just need a lot of help with it too don't they. It's not. It's like.

[00:07:27.130]
It's hard work. having children in the care system in your classroom isn't isn't easy. I remember as a teacher that young person in my class who was in and out of care because of their mental health needs then which meant that her mum couldn't always respond to her.

[00:07:45.470]
And I think that was the first experience I remember really of a child in care but I guess at the time I'd never really thought about that children might have to go into care. because There's no one else to care for them. as mum's ill and in hospital. So whilst mum loves her really loves her so much like what I was able to care for so as a teacher it is interesting as my experience ofhow it played out a bit in the classroom like what it's like.

[00:08:17.320]
So I guess long story short I just think they're such a needy group of young people and it's not just looked after the children you know previously looked after children as well so that's part of our remit. My experience of being a main grade EP.

[00:08:36.040]
It was often my role was around adopted people that things were there would standout as the hardest case work if you like that I've been involved in

[00:08:48.540]
what made that the most the most difficult and

[00:08:53.760]
well I have personal views on that to do with the dynamic of becoming an adoptive parent.

[00:09:00.490]
And how difficult that is for people the standout case also involved somebody who works for the local authority. as The adopted father which made that really difficult.

[00:09:14.550]
But also they've gone on to have birth children that that is quite um I think birth children and adoptive is a very challenging mix.

[00:09:28.140]
So yeah. Yeah. So I think yeah the case that is the case but that's always been the most tricky I guess I've always felt that perhaps if we weren't working on a case by case basis there is stuff that you need to do.

[00:09:41.400]
Wmy role still individual work. But actually there's a lot of stuff that's, that people need to understand more that schools need to have the tools to be able to um to work effectively with these young people because actually if they don't the outcomes are, and they're outcomes that affect all us these young people end up in our prison system know that impacts on all of us and actually some young people we're having relationships with as well people. And we want them to be we want. We want our society to work in effective ways don't we, I don't think it always can for.

[00:10:26.030]
Some of these young people if we don't think differently about how to support from the beginning.

[00:10:32.510] Interviewer
So it sounds like you feel that that's quite an important role for. EPs maybe it's that capacity building. Kind of systemic level of work in schools.

[00:10:48.900]
Yeah I think that we hold quite a lot of I think that schools have kind of have so have confidence in educational psychologists through the individual. Probably initially but I think that because of the relationships that EPs develop with schools. I think that sometimes we are well placed to be able to help them think differently about issues and maybe get a bit beyond the defenses. It's not that every time I deliver training people just go. That was brilliant. I have no question about that.

[00:11:23.300]
It's just brilliant. I get that that doesn't happen and good that it doesn't. That's right isn't it. People should question and challenge

[00:11:30.870]
but I think that I think something about the relationship that we're able to develop with school settings makes us helps us to be in there getting them to think about more I guess. And yeah work in those more systemic ways I think because we can work at all levels um you know we can do can do something at an individual level and then you can say to them actually you know this there's more to think bad about this you know we could do training around us we could do projects around this kind of thing. So I think for that reason I think we're well placed.

[00:12:15.650]
And so we meet with a lot of EPs regionally now as well that are doing the same role as us. And there's so much going on in this area. And EPs they're often are often leading the work around this in settings you know a lot of attachment aware and trauma informed work that's going on regionally and nationally and EPs are in that and that's important because we're able to, I think that we're able to support um people to think I guess both about the educational

impact but about how um I think sometimes the situations is that the looked after children is that one one placement sets off the other.

[00:13:10.390]
So you need to be able to work effectively with the foster carers and effectively with the school setting and whilst our role is more aimed at supporting the school setting. I think we're able to work to bridge those gaps and to support that relationship.

[00:13:25.120]
I think that that that can be quite important in what keeps somebody in a school or you know keeps a foster carer having confidence in the overall support around the young person for that reason as well I think we're able to work with a range of different parties to help

[00:13:44.200] Interviewer
does that, do those kinds of things. Tap into what you said before about wanting to I suppose wanting to make a bigger difference. Wanting to do more do you feel like systemic working and the working with home and school kind of can do that more.

[00:14:01.600]
Yeah yeah and I guess I think my experience at the moment is I guess working in sort of multiple working at different levels gives you more scope for doing that also. So say you're working around an individual in a school you might be working with the adults that are most closely involved. bit I mean I still reflect on my experience of being a teacher trying to support somebody else's child on a corridor but actually I didn't really know that child's needs so I was doing what I felt was most effective at that time and so I think there's for me.

[00:14:36.330]
That's often the case that you can work with the adults that are immediately around a young person but unless you're working wider in the setting it can often be undermined or the confidence of the adult can be undermined by what they believe the views of others to be. So I might be able to quite confidently in the consultation help somebody to go you know what what he needs is he needs me to understand the emotion that led to the behavior and to do that I'm going to name that emotion and I'm going to show him empathy so it might you know i could quite confidently help that and that member of staff might be thinking.

[00:15:10.640]
I completely agree. that's absolutely what I'm going to do I believe that to be important I'm going to try it. But if somebody else some other member of staff in the school is watching and thinks Well that was that was poor behavior that should have been a C1 then that's it you're suddenly undermined. So I think you have to to make it effective. I think you've got to work beyond just the immediate people or beyond the immediate child. and actually People very quickly start to make links and say huh Well i get that.

[00:15:46.010]
That was their experience but this child over here isn't in care but actually I'm aware that, this that and the other. So I believe a lot of the work that we do is important to looked after children believe it's important. for Previously looked children but actually it's a much wider group. a lot of it. a lot of the things that we're doing. We're often saying this can be any child. like A child can be still be with their birth family and have experienced developmental

trauma, have a whole host of adverse childhood experiences that have affected where things are at for them.

[00:16:19.630]
So it's just I guess a lot of it I feel is fundamental to how we understand human beings and how we interact. And that actually we might go in around one young person but that it's more beneficial for a wider group. So you can't ever see the point of you just sticking at the individual level you're like oh a lot more people need to think about this and you need to think about how that plays out for a number of children in their classroom and what they could do because then you're not having to do. You're not speaking one way to one child.

[00:16:50.140]
You can speak that way to loads of people it is really just a niceer way to interact.

[00:16:56.340]
But yeah a Iot of it I think is just a fundamental understanding of how we develop that can be beneficial for a wider group.

[00:17:05.320] Interviewer
So using kind of using I suppose an extreme situation in terms of a child who's been in care and experienced potentially quite a few difficult things to them. Encourage that sort of empathy. and understanding towards others more generally.

[00:17:27.860]
I think I wonder if people used to think about case work oh well if I if I've helped a school around this young person then they'll probably generalize this understanding to the next child. But if the fact that we continue having case work all the time shows that ain't the case, you know, they don't generalize it they do need to be have it spelled out for each individual child. And so case work on it's own isn't going to help people to think differently and apply it differently. It needs more than that. And yeah an extreme situation. And if there was a follow up training or development or thinking about policies in the setting it might help them to apply it to more young people.

[00:18:06.570]
And I guess I don't want to minimize it you know I do think actually looked after children do require some stuff that is specific for them.

[00:18:14.620]
And yeah there are ways in which we work that you know are very much about supposing that individual in that setting and yeah often I think the schools themselves will say oh I think more staff need to know about this because whilst this affects him it affects other children too.

[00:18:34.310] Interviewer
Yeah I guess they're quite nice moments when those moments of realisation

[00:18:41.090]
yeah they are. I guess it depends on who the member of staff is in the school because sometimes you think that person is somebody that can make a difference to how a school thinks.

[00:18:51.610]
Yeah I had we had a personal education plan meeting around a young person and it was really difficult.

[00:19:00.010]
the designated teacher in the school is also the SENCo. and Was really struggling to understand why why we thought that some of the ways that they were approaching things might be exacerbating difficulties. We were trying to be like supportive and gently challenge and yeah she obviously found it really difficult to accept that the ways in which they'd been working. There was another way to do it and we invited the head teacher to the next meeting and I wasn't sure how that was going to go but actually it was so helpful because he suddenly went.

[00:19:34.890]
But everything you are saying is how I think we should be working with young people. That is absolutely how I think we should be doing it. And even more helpfully we don't get this very often he said. So what have I done that has not helped my staff to see that that is the vision I have for it and then he rang us up afterwards and said I'm on board. I'm on board and was just saying how can I help my staff. So that this is the way

[00:20:01.650] Interviewer
This is the dream

[00:20:07.400]
It's not often that way.

[00:20:09.990] Interviewer
I think I've already got a glimpse that it's not the norm

[00:20:13.650]
but it does make such a difference. If that if you can come if you can create the relationship with the leaders in the school and the leaders to see it that way because that's when that's when real things happen. That's when a policy changes and this is how this is how we're doing things in our schools. And that's, you knoe reinforced with staff. This is this is how we talk to young people in this setting. I think we've got situations where that has happened.

[00:20:43.610]
Yeah that's rewarding.

[00:20:47.610] Interviewer
So thinking about the kind of views of children and young people in care and potentially those previously in care as well. What are your experiences of gaining those views whether you think those views should be gained in particular ways.

[00:21:09.020]
Right. OK. I always um. I've got lots of different views on this and some conflicting views.

[00:21:17.270]

That's helpful. where I am involved with a young person. I believe I should meet that young person if it is appropriate to meet them and gather their views. And if I don't think that has been done already but the nature of our role is that if a young person is in one of our r schools or in another school out of local authority it should be the school EP that's involved. the situations when we're involved are normally when the people have not got a school setting and I'm mindful that these are often young people that have been pinging all across the UK and are experiencing breakdown to breakdown and are effectively in crisis.

[00:22:07.750]
And so often my challenge will be when I'm asked to do a piece of work around that young person which is often about getting them an EHC so that we can get them into some kind of educational provision. That's a summary of an otherwise complicated way of working. Then I then question that, you know these are young people that are in a really difficult position and actually whilst I don't think I'm horrible to meet. I hope I'm not, um am I the right person to be meeting that young person at that time and gathering their views do they need to meet somebody else.

[00:22:41.610]
that They're probably not going to see again and who's was asking them about stuff that's really personal to them. And I'm always very mindful about that. And so there are situations where and there have been situations where the person themmself has not wanted to meet me which I would always respect. But I've often said you know rI'd eally, if they if they're able to share some of those views with the person that they are trusting the most at the moment that would be very helpful. But I respect them not wanting to meet with me.

[00:23:10.500]
And then there's been situations where I've thought this person's having a really awful time but I think I think. I've only got my perspective really. But when I have met that young person um it's been quite it's felt like quite a productive conversation where we've been able to explore different things. And whilst obviously it depends on the individual some young people are really guarded quite understandably but the young people are crying out for someone to listen to them and don't feel like anybody is. So you've got children that get moved all over the UK saying I don't want to be here.

[00:23:50.450]
I want to be back in R that's where I want to be. I want to be near my family. And so my experience is often meeting them is that they've been they feel frustrated they feel like they've tried to have these conversations with social workers or they tried to have these conversations in personal education plan meetings and they don't feel like anyone is listening to them. And I wonder sometimes as an EP I'm not trying to like, big myself up but as an EP that we bring certain different ways of listening that perhaps other the people felt they have been trying so and often sometimes I think that yeah.

[00:24:30.670]
So I think there might be ways that we that we listen that help some young people though actually and I guess once I've listened I'm always very mindful that we've got to do something about it. So if you've got a young person saying this would work for me this wouldn't work for me and we've got to be we've got to think about that really carefully. And even if we can't agree with their perspective on that we've got to be very careful about how we help them to understand that or at least feel that they've been heard on that matter.

[00:25:04.800]
Because sometimes they're children aren't they, they're are still children and they can't weigh up all the different variables and they can't always be the clearest on ways in which they are vulnerable. They want to be with their mates. They don't see that that's making them vulnerable to anything but you know. We've got a lot of young people who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation as a result of their experiences and as a result of who they are there interacting with. And you know like just being an adolescent is hard to weigh up. Isn't it that risk's worth taking or I want to be with that person.

[00:25:51.650]
That's something that's fun to do and I want to do it but play it all into the mix of that not being able to trust your own feelings and not recognising how to have an effective relationship with somebody else that's reciprocal all that sort of stuff.

[00:26:06.930]
And I see that play out for a lot of our looked after girls.

[00:26:11.510]
um so where was I going? I think where I think the situation is right and I take advice from a lot of people on that about meeting the young person so I always ring the social worker um to set, to find out more about what the young person's like and sometimes people will say Oh you know she really distrusts professionals. I think it would be difficult for, so sometimes you might visit with somebody else or sometimes I might say I don't need to I don't need to meet her or him or what have you. um, but when I do when I do meet young people.

[00:26:54.350]
I guess I try in a variety of different ways to gather their views I'm quite into using images as a way. So I use quite a lot of the blob people at the moment so that we talk about the different expressions that they're showing and then we might explore different. How do you, show me one that shows how you feel about when you went to your last school. or show me one and so using sort of visual ways of explaining and it also helps me to find out. Well how much sort of emotional language the young person's got as well.

[00:27:33.830]
I do a lot of scaling and so I saw a young person. the other week She was scaling the various, she'd been to the schools bless her she was scoring the various schools and explaining to me why she felt that that school was a six or that one was a one. So I guess it's a way of getting a bit more richness a bit more, to finding out a bit more about the experience and how it felt for her um, from her point of view. um, so there's ways that we've done it in individual casework but myself and K have also met with the looked after council in R

[00:28:12.510]
So they're a group of young people who come together on a weekly basis to do activities and things but they also do, they take forward particular issues that they think are important. So they did a bin liner campaign um where they were bringing to light the fact that actually a lot of young people when they're moved to their next setting their stuff's chucked in a bin liner and they would say how to made them feel. And they took that and did events with socail care to that social care could see how that might feel to have your belongings and what does it mean to have stuff in a bin liner.

[00:28:50.950]
And so they managed to support, we've got loads of suitcases now um, and then we're working with a charity around that. They've also devised some training for social workers called Total respect training which is on the basis of their experiences. So a lot of them will say they don't feel that their social worker listens to them. and that's interesting because I think sometimes it's also it's how that feels isn't it. And then sometimes it's do you only feel listened to if what you want happens as a result of it. And sometimes that can't happen for a lot of different reasons.

[00:29:27.630]
And so sometimes the young people, they all wanna go home, that's what they want. They want to be at home the majority, not all, you know. I've met a little boy was he two? who desperately didn't want to go home. So scared that he won't get to stay with his foster carers and just needed so much reassurance that that would be able to happen and that the court was going to explain. and all this sort of stuff. But most people most of the young people I've met with so far want to go back home, that's where they want to be and is being listened to that happening?.

[00:30:06.710]
or How do we give people the experience of being listened to so that even though we can hear their words and we can see how important it is for them. But we still can't do that thing.

[00:30:17.420]
And I'm not a social worker so I don't know how that plays out. but We did a path with and so you know I don't know if you'll have come across them. have you come across them in your training?. So planning alternative tomorrows with hope We did a path with the looked after council um and in the nowbit. That's the sort of things that they were explaining.

[00:30:39.460]
But what links they were explaining about the now of social workers listening.

[00:30:45.670]
But they were also explaining about the process of having their views gathered as part of the personal education plan meeting. They were saying. um it was more of one of them had said that actually often the adult will stand over them so that they might say oh type them into the computer, What your views are, an adult will stand over them or the adult will kind of rehearse with them. Well you're going to put me as your favorite teacher aren't you you're gonna.., so Actually we do think that there's lots of different ways in which looked after children's voice is being collected but what the looked after children with saying at, um during the path was that they were saying Well social workers don't listen to us and when they do think they've listened when I've seen what they wrote down so you know when they can ask for their notes or what have you it doesn't reflect what they felt that they were saying or feeling at that time.

[00:31:40.770]
So they feel like there was a mismatch between what they were saying and what the social worker took from that, and that when school staff are gathering their views that's being influenced heavily by the adult who's wanting it's showing the person that they want a particular outcome from that. So it's not neutral is it. No we're not genuine.

[00:32:01.000] Interviewer
That's not really led by the young person.

[00:32:02.680]
and also looked after children. Time after time what adults will say is that they're eager to please they want to please the adults around them. And so how how do we know how do we know that what they're saying is based on how they're really feeling and not actually think I need that adult to like me they're the only person that I get on with in the school.

[00:32:25.400]
It seems important to them I'd better write something like this. And what happens if I don't? you know what happens if I if I share this view.

[00:32:36.310] Interviewer
Yeah yeah is that adult going to be trustworthy in response to

[00:32:40.940]
And that's the other issue isn't it as an EP coming in. You know it can be the first time they've met me. And you know if I've got a young person somewhere else in the U.K. I'm probably only going to make that trip once. um so I'd go meet them. I mean I would try and build some rapport and then I might ask them questions and we might do some activities together. we Might do it like a resiliency questionnaire. might do a brief with them. And we might do some card sorting and some scaling.

[00:33:10.550]
But basically it's an EP zooming in saying tell me what you think and then zooming out. and there's issues about that aren't there, like Ethically I don't always feel that comfortable about it. But sometimes when I come back staff's, people wanna know what have they said. And I think you know them better, why haven't you sat them down And that's like some of mine and K's training you know. we're training on how to, we're trying to help other people with how to listen because that's it's important.

[00:33:45.310]
that The people working with them day in and day out listen. But conflicting again at least I'm not in that situation.

[00:33:56.330]
They don't have to please me. And sometimes I am able to convince them that I am here to listen to you, I know the issues you've got here. So one of the young people I went to meet she was really annoyed with her virtual school education advisor because she felt he had put her in a school which she didn't want to be in, was really cross. And I was like I work in a team with him. I said I'm here to listen to what you've got to say. he's actually a really nice guy but you know I'm here to listen to what you've got to say.

[00:34:32.770]
And I can go back and I can have conversations with them. And in that situation we were able to sort out what she wanted.

[00:34:39.320]

We were able to do that so then we're giving the young person an experience of listening to their words rather than them having to show us with their behavior.

[00:34:53.180]
there was a girl I saw last week she was just saying school clearly didn't want me, kept putting me in isolation and I want to be in R. So what you gonna do. What she did was so she basically they was saying. So I just made it as bad as I possibly could. Then they can't keep me can they. They have to let me go then I can then I can move. So if we're not listening to their words then they're showing us, they're communicating it anyway.

[00:35:19.320] Interviewer
which is actually incredibly resourceful

[00:35:19.490]
So what she probably was old school not

[00:35:23.960]
her's was conscious it's not always is it

[00:35:28.330]
But yes for many of them many of them will say that I don't want to be here. They don't want me here. So how do you get excluded?. I know That really well, and they do

[00:35:38.320]
 they know how to get excluded really well, really quick as well, kind of go from place to place

[00:35:45.340] Interviewer
so it sounds like the it sounds like you think that maybe EPs kind of have skills that are useful in gathering views.

[00:35:59.960] Interviewer
And then there's a there's a bit of a tension almost about about the EPs' relation to the systems around that young person.

[00:36:09.090] Interviewer
they're not always the best placed but actually that might end up being an advantage because they're not embedded in the system they can come from outside and be a different face.

[00:36:22.820]
Yeah. Yeah. I think the tension I worry about the most is the impact on the young person. So whether it's the right time to them when they're seing person after person every day um, who's different you know they might be getting different social workers different foster carers. That I always worry about that one the most i think well whether it's the right thing to do then. but I definitely do think um we bring skills to listen to the young person and that I mean I genuinely am not taking an agenda to those conversations um, but I think that young people spot the agenda of others.

[00:37:05.330]

So the social work they work out well you're not going to let me go into my parents' and so already there's the school's agenda. You want to look good You want to be seen to do is or you want to do. Or you want me to look bad. Whereas I don't take an agenda to the conversation I have. Apart from. I'm just really interested to know how it feels from their point of view. what they've experienced and what that's been like

[00:37:32.820] Interviewer
and do you think it's a challenge to get that young person to believe that?

[00:37:37.930]
Yeah absolutely. And you know you don't always walk away and think that conversation that person you know don't always walk away and think that person is being honest with you and because if you've just met somebody the once it would be really difficult wouldn't it to so, there's things we do in advance. so sometimes I would send a booklet in advance so that the foster carer or if they're in a school setting could share with them who I am so they can see my face or sometimes written a letter in advance and things like that. To try and help but yeah sometimes young people understandably.

[00:38:28.470]
just think I haven't met one person that's helped me so I'm gonna stop meeting people. That's fair enough.

[00:38:36.340] Interviewer
Yeah yeah it's. I find it really interesting that it's come up in a few of the other interviews this sort of I suppose dilemma or sort of. There are there are other people who are around the person probably better placed to have a relationship with them. Although that sounds like it's kind of complicated by the fact that often young people aren't feeling like those people are listening to them enough. And perhaps those people are there. in that role for different reasons so they're not necessarily equipped to kind of collect those views and in the best way.

[00:39:23.030] Interviewer
And then there's also this dynamic of the other person having to bear that so again and again to get to all different people some of whom potentially respond quite appropriately to. Yeah. So yeah it sounds like there's a sort of I wish I could be more useful because I've got the ability to listen well I'm but I'm not in the right position. What do you think the. not THE answer.

[00:39:57.040]
Well I think there's a sense in which that we've picked up from the looked after council and from the lady who runs that is that looks have the children feel worn of being asked their views. They ask for their views. all processes require them to be asked for their views. And that lots of them say sick sick of being asked their views why are they sick of it because it feels so that they're asked for so many different reasons for looked after children reviews, PEP reviews, annual reviews, they can be asked all the time and also the council itself gets asked what do you think on this, what do you think on that.

[00:40:42.600]
And their experience that they talk about is that often when they're asked is just to tick a box for somebody else and maybe also they're worn of being asked because they don't feel like

they're listened to as a result of it. So we're asking them lots and lots of times. What's your opinion on this but what is the impact of that. And actually it just compounds the sense of distrust of professionals probably. Well you're always asking for my views but nothing happens as a result.

[00:41:13.770]
So I think it's hard isn't it.

[00:41:16.790]
We shouldn't not ask, we shouldn't not ask their views but how are we going to ask, who's going to do it and how is it most effectively done and how often, like, are we asking them every week what do you think about this and what do you think about that. Well unless I mean we had this come up in a team meeting about adults you ask them for it. But what happens as a result.

[00:41:39.350]
And I think unless there's a feedback loop that helps the young person see well, the experience of being listened to is like this and probably lots of children don't don't experience lots of children and young people not even in the care system don't experience what it feels like to be genuinely listened to. So I guess there's a tension there, I don't think we should stop asking them their views. but Unless it's done thoughtfully and with a lot of skill behind it then we're probably making situations worse not better.

[00:42:18.290]
Possibly.

[00:42:20.710]
And perhaps it's about a higher level of... I mean the role of designated teacher in school like changes all the time. like the person the body in the school. You know I had a lady at the beginning of this term, um she came back and she e-mailed me and she was like so I've just come into school and apparently now I'm going to be designated teacher and SENCo not had an experience of special educational needs. Could you point me in the direction of some training, and you know you just think Wow. That happens all the time.

[00:42:52.570]
you can't assume that the person in a role is there because they have passion commitment experience or knowledge in it. So asking a designated teacher to collect the young person's views as part of a personal education plan meeting. there's a lot more to it isn't there really about how how you listen to somebody.

[00:43:16.150]
There's more that needs to be done with that, and with social workers but then, that's such a hard role.

[00:43:24.050]
Yeah I'm sure it is

[00:43:25.680]
I was with a team manager last week who works eight to eight every day. She stops and has her tea And then she works 10 till midnight and she works one of the days at the weekend

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and she said Yeah that's what all the team managers do. and a number of the staff. And you think wow yeah

[00:43:43.800]
that is overwhelming isn't it.. I don't think People do their.

[00:43:47.510]
Best listening like that

[00:43:51.860]
 you've got to have some level of well just exhaustion and probably empathy fatigue.

[00:43:57.950]
Yeah. that came up in our training. When we were doing about emotion coaching we were talking about having empathy for others and the social worker said I'm going to just be really honest and say I can't, I just can't do it I can't have empathy for them because it's too wearing, I'm too like too overwhelmed by it. If I have empathy for them then I can't cope with it. that was their position and I thought was so stark, like to hear it. Yeah you can't have empathy for people. Maybe she's in the wrong job. But actually you get it don't you like you can.

[00:44:32.090]
Maybe she's just being very honest. Yeah well maybe other people feel the same.

[00:44:36.010]
But yeah I think compassion fatigue. It's like I could definitely understand that that would be how people would feel and none of that is conducive to listening to the because actually in their head their going right I've got to get this person a care placement where am I gonna get it. Oh yeah I know they said that they wanted to be here. They wanted this but, who have I got.

[00:45:04.560]
Interesting that individual is legally speaking the parent of a young person essentially fulfilling some of those roles but are parents good listeners?.

[00:45:16.020]
We kind of assume that everybody can do it without actually giving it enough thought really.

[00:45:22.030]
And I've just thought of the other thing. So we asked the lac council and they're like everyone asks our views and then and so the virtual school has got this creative mentoring project running and K probably talked about this because I know it's something that she's like grappling with all the time in that we wanted to evaluate the impact of that project. It's a pilot project that we're continuing with. So a young person's matched with a creative mentor and they spend two to four hours with them a week just doing something interesting whatever they fancy and there's like a way of monitoring as it goes along that the adult can sort of reflect on how engaged or what have you the young person was, but when it came to evaluating it.

[00:46:01.430]

you sort of feel like we need to ask the young person. How does it feel for them. um but what one of the young people had shared in discussion with the creative mentor was that they liked that it was just for them. and that nobody was asking them about it, they weren't being asked how does it feel. It wasn't another thing that they had to sort of, just it was just theirs, it wasn't anybody else's and that act of somebody saying well what is the impact of it for you kind of took it out there and made it. This is what somebody else is doing to me rather than this is a with experience that I'm having with another person.

[00:46:37.750]
that I'm just enjoying it for what it is.

[00:46:39.860]
And so that's been the tension that K's been discussing with me quite a lot.

[00:46:47.260]
and It's a project in D.

[00:46:49.390]
and We watched some videos recently and they had asked young people about the impact but like three years, they'd been doing it for three years just that sensing that everything that happens to them, they then have to say they then have to say how that was for them.

[00:47:10.790] Interviewer
They must be exhausted.

[00:47:12.140]
I think they are exhausted. With people saying What do you think about that, how do you feel about that.

[00:47:27.410]
And as you said before probably under pressure to get the right answer.

[00:47:31.130]
What is it you want to know. Is this really effective. Has this been wonderful.

[00:47:35.840]
Yes. Yeah. And people when you point out the difference between open ended questions and leading questions to people people get it but they still find it very difficult to ask an open ended question.

[00:47:51.500]
It's not. It's it's not well understood I don't think because people want a particular outcome, don't they

[00:47:59.720]
If you put a lot of money into someting people want to know it was effective. Tell me how good it was. Yeah. So I think there is this tension also about just being overwhelmed with being asked everything.

[00:48:17.260]

Yeah.

So when and it sounds like the ideal scenario might be more kind of joined up work in terms of that gathering of the views and it happening not too many times but being done by the ideal person and what have you.

[00:48:39.190] Interviewer
So would the ideal answer be that someone like an EP gathers the views early on fairly early on and then and then it doesn't have to.

[00:48:52.220]
But it's the purpose Isn't it, what is the purpose of gathering the views and whose purpose is it fulfilling. I think it's often an adult led purpose um for whatever needs to happen. So I'm often asking their views because it's about finding the most appropriate educational provision for them, so What was their last provision like. but There are lots of different purposes that people want to have that interaction with them and it changes as you go along doesn't it. So you know a lot of children come into care when they're teenagers 13 or 14.

[00:49:26.760]
It's like the average age that children are brought into care but what that young person feels about things. Age 13 and what they then go on to feel about at 16 is going to change isn't it. And we're not always the continuous factor within that we might be involved in terms of identifying educational provision. But then we might not be involved again after that. So I guess it's something about how actually the workforce in general needs to be more mindful. But then I guess your hinting at what should the system be, what should the process or system be.

[00:50:05.290]
or if there should be one

[00:50:11.220] Interviewer
I'm not expecting you to magically have answers to that, there's people higher up the food chain to work those things out.

[00:50:24.210] Interviewer
This is interesting isn't it. Yes I suppose it's kind of it's that part of the brain that we're probably all slightly leaning towards as EPs and trainee EPs trying to find solutions and move forward with it I suppose.

[00:50:40.700]
I guess what I try to say to myself is I need to do I need to understand the situation as best as I can when I'm getting involved and I need to think about there's things for the EP to think about the people around it and that's what I've tried to have that conversation. Who is the best who is best placed to have this conversation right now who has got the best relationship. And sometimes people do want it to be the EP because they they are self-aware enough to say you know our relationship is pretty strained I've put her in this care placement and she's just really mad about that.

[00:51:11.960]

And you know actually I've only just recently met her, I'm a new social worker to her. I'm not the best placed or school might be saying you know the relationships here are really dicey. And so you know it might be that you are best placed and it's hard to take that information second hand from somebody else as well because you don't know which way it was asked. Yeah I know I've I've been looking at PEPs and I've been saying oh the young person and say they really enjoyed maths and you read about that. Well that's their views.

[00:51:44.250]
I don't have the context of actually the maths teacher was the person sat next to that young person saying you did really well in maths last week. Yeah I like maths. Yep that's my favorite subject. So there's that too isn't there. Yeah. Like, if you're taking the information from somebody else how do we know how you know how it was gathered here.

[00:52:02.190] Interviewer
Yeah even maths is my favourite subject is quite different from I like maths. I don't like maths compared to Playstation but it's better than Geography.

[00:52:13.460]
But if you're maths teacher is sat next to you then you like it. It's pretty good.

[00:52:16.260]
So yeah.

[00:52:17.950]
Okay. So we've touched on this a bit when you when you've been gathering the views of children and young people in care. You talked about using sort of visual and image based things a lot. Would that be different from how you would gain the views of other young people?

[00:52:36.430]
No not really. And I've been recently. I mean I use a variety of different things but I use things like the bear cards with different emotions that blob people different emotions and I use the cards from the functional analysis of behaviour cards, the multi-element plan cards, depending on the situation or depending what I've got in my bag maybe sometimes and I think and depending on what my initial conversation with the person is like and so I wouldn't say it differsnecessarily to a to what I do with otheryoung people and I guess I try to go to build rapport first by finding out about what they like and sharing some things together to try make the conversation more relaxed, depending on the age of the person I'll be really clear about why I've been asked to be involved why I'm there.

[00:53:31.300]
And what, you know what we'd be doing together. So I try to make that really clear. And sometimes I just do things to go with the interest of the person as well. So if there was a game or something in the room then we might play that or sometimes I'd take one with me but I wouldn't say that what I'd do is vastly different to other people because I'm not less interested in other young people's views either. So yeah I guess at the moment I take quite a visual approach to how I gather the views but if I see that the person is not into that, so I met a girl at her foster care foster house the other week and I put the blob people out on the floor and she found, I mean normally my experience been people go huh.

[00:54:17.440]
Oh I really like these. that sort of thing she was like, I don't reallty get them, I don't get them Well what do you mean? And we looked at s it wasn't necessary that she couldn't identify the emotion that was on it but she couldn't take the step of saying, of connecting any of them with how she had experienced something. But we did scaling instead and she could rate how she felt from 1 to 10. And that made a lot more sense to her. So we went with the way that worked best for her.

[00:54:54.530]
But no, I think I take the same approach with children in care as others

[00:54:56.050] Interviewer
do you think there's anything that you would do differently for children in care.

[00:55:02.330] Interviewer
Would you go in with a different mindset, ask about home life, not ask about home life, anything like that?.

[00:55:23.180]
No I always ask about home life in both so if I'm doing scaling. I'd often scale home and if I if it sometimes you can get from the initial conversation how much somebody wants to talk about birth family and how much they don't, so the girl I met last week loves her family desperate to be near them and was quite happy to talk about it talk about that and then I was with a much younger child a couple months ago who really I don't always get this but he really wanted to share his fears and share what it had been like in his home.

[00:56:05.370]
and what he was scared about now and actually on that day there was something in the person's office that showed a picture of the emotion and had like a sentence starter. So I feel ... when I'm on my own and the person could pick up the image and put it on and that that really prompted a lot of conversation from this young person about the situations in which they felt worried so he was telling me a lot about his worries at nighttime. so I guess I judge it on both what I know to be the background so often try to get a chronology ahead of meeting a young person so that I'm aware of what their experiences have been like so I'd often judge on the basis of that, probably on what conversations I'd go for but if a young person brings something up then I would always try to explore that.

[00:57:02.860]
if I felt they wanted to but obviously I'd be very mindful about not going down particularavenues if I thought that that would be very traumatic for them because I'm not gonna be around and they're going to be going back to the classroom afterwards. And so I guess I'm sometimes more mindful about how you close a session and how someone might feel safe at the end of it as well, given the stuff that they've shared. I guess might be more intense than some of the stuff that sometimes dealing with day to day maingrade EP caseload basis.

[00:57:37.270]
Yeah I suppose that caution early on about whether it's right to to go to direct to their views and how to do things would would that be the same across all young people you're working with or would you be more mindful of whether they want to share theirviews.

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[00:57:59.050]
Yeah I guess I am more mindful when it comes to looked after and previously looked after children. There's normally more people involved in which to have that conversation ahead. Whereas I guess. if the school refers a young person into our service I meet the carer, I might watch in the classroom, I meet the teacher and the teacher assistant and I meet the young person that's you know sort of like my formula.

[00:58:28.700]
But probably I do question it a little less when that happens. I guess it depends on the reasom the young person's being refered into the service as well.

[00:58:45.000]
As to what I think the issues might be that the young person's dealing with

[00:58:50.070] Interviewer
this is a sort of a related question I suppose but do you think there's a pressure to treat everyone the same.

[00:59:02.990] Interviewer
When I say when I've when I've been doing these interviews people have been hesitant to say I treat anyone different from anyone else. but then there's also that is this this could you expect I treat everyone the same. but I'm additionally mindful for children and young people in care in these particular ways.

[00:59:34.740] Interviewer
And I don't think that there's there's nothing wrong with that kind of tension necessarily but I just wonder if there is an underlying pressure to to treat everyone the same.

[00:59:48.980]
 I think for me I guess it goes back to what I was saying at the beginning in what I think is effective about.

[00:59:55.790]
How School staff should be interacting with children in the care system is effective how we all interact with young people but there are bits that they need to be more mindful of But I think that respectfully taking the views of young people forms part of the educational psychologist's way of working doesn't it. so if I find it's almost like a if it works well with children in care, it works well for others. If you can teach if you can teach the hardest young people in your class it's it's actually you're actually teaching really well for other people and I guess that's probably the same when it comes to EP practice isn't it.

[01:00:41.360]
And if it works effectively with looked after children then it probably works effectively with others.

[01:00:48.320]
And I guess some of it goes with what you're interested in at the time or what reources you've got in the service or what courses people have been on or have they shared it.

[01:00:58.640]
And a bit of trial and error about wht you've tried and also it's different. I mean a lot of the EPs in my service would spend a lot of time doing cognitive assessments whereas it's not really part of my practice. And often the situations I'm going into people aren't screaming out and saying that this young person has got learning difficulties. They say this young person has got social emotional mental health difficulties. So it probably would form less of what I do. but I think also because again if I am swooping in to a young person for a day and coming away, really that's what I'm going to do with them? they're so boring and

[01:01:43.370]
They don't help anybody's confidence. So I'm just like that's not what I'm going to be doing when I'm spending my time with them whereas I wonder whether all EP colleagues would think it that way. Maybe they would. They do that as a matter of course. But maybe I'm additionally mindful of that with looked after children that actually I don't want to take them to the point of frustration. I want to meet them. I want them to have a good experience of meeting somebody that listens and cares to them and that they can share how they're feeling with in the hope that actually I can support adults to think differently about what this young person wants and how it might be achievable and how to take that into consideration with what they're doing. Because yeah because they're not all doing that.

[01:02:35.390] Interviewer
Yeah yeah. It's just interesting that the sort of I that I think I'm naturally drawn towards any kind of internal tension and conflicts and all those sorts of things.

[01:02:53.470]
Yeah yeah.

[01:02:56.720] Interviewer
And also engaging with a sense of kind of doing the right thing and whatever that is. So in a way did you trying to change a meeting. Okay. So I think no teams made up for walking up and not teams not and not quite as far along in the sort of constructionist line maybe as Sheffield. But a card office is similar in terms of this sort of social constructionists and. Attitude of challenging assumed knowledge and all that sort of thing. So yeah see this there's a sense of kind of this is what I want to be able to say and I'm not saying it's come through particularly in this interview.

[01:03:43.450] Interviewer
But whatever the substance of this is this is the right answer. But maybe there's more to it than it is. Yes it's interesting. Yeah. And actually that's that it sounds like that's reflective of how these people are quite often feeling. Yeah.

[01:04:00.410] Interviewer
And yes that's the guy asking me. Well yeah exactly. I think that's face to say yeah let's just save some time. You tell me the answer and the question. Yeah. You just write that down in that area.

[01:04:13.920] Interviewer
Yeah yeah yeah. So what I'm thinking about the kind of the end of the process then you you said that this frustration sometimes among young people that they give their views

and they're not used has not been has not been the majority of experiences you've had of. And of the decision making and the sort of use of views. There've been times when it's been good and bad and

[01:04:42.180]
I think I've had reasonable success in getting what the young people want. Probably recently but we don't do that many individual case work. I work around the young person that doesn't involve meeting the young person but arguably it could involve it more. So we've been doing these meeting styles that where we meet with staff well they're kind of multi agency and we do them for transition. So our young people are moving around quite frequently and we've been trying these meeting styles, they came from S, called a solution focused.

[01:05:16.810]
Transition meeting or a solution focused staff meeting. And it's got a set structure and the purpose of being we talk about positives and the social worker shows the chronology and we have a wider staff group than you might normally have, all the staff that are going to be involved in any of the staff that are important to be there. And then I do some psychology where I link what we've heard in the chronology to how they might present. And then we have some action plan at the end. And that process, I've often done it with quite young, I've probably done it with secondary as well.

[01:05:48.290]
It's probably an even split between primary and secondary. I was going to do one recently. It got cancelled in the end but I was gonna do one recently and actually we had a planning meeting beforehand. And one of the things that we were talking about in that planning meeting is actually we'd really like the young person's permission to do the meeting, to see how she'd feel about it, she'd had a lot of frustrations about how school staff responded to her in school and then also how she would like if she would like and how she would like her views to be shared as part of that meeting.

[01:06:19.810]
So I'd made an offer to go meet with her and she didn't want to meet with me but she was happy to talk with foster carer about how things were going for her. but if that hadn't formed part of that meeting process before it would have been a very adult focused meeting. prior to that but it did make me think actually we do we need to think a bit more about the young person's perspective as part of that meeting. It's quite tightly structured in part because the agenda of that meeting is make those staff feel confident about responding to the needs of that young person and hear the story and understand how that might impact on how that young person behaves with others and then let's plan what we're going to do.

[01:07:05.230]
but actually I don't think that adding the young person's views into that would be a massive issue or you could do like you do in circle of adults where you get one of the adults to listen and then share take the role of the person and try to put the perspective of how they think the young person might be seeing the situation as well as part of it. So I think there's more ways to put it in that but your question wasn't that anyway your question was ....

[01:07:47.430] Interviewer
Yeah I mean it's not necessarily about whether about whether you've kind of implemented what the young person wants or whether that's happened

[01:07:55.860] Interviewer
just it was just whether it happens whether it happens a lot and whether it's the majority or minority of the time yeah what it means for that to work and what it means for it to not work.

[01:08:12.230]
So yeah I guess thinking like I say there's not loads of young people that we're individually involved with, our work tends to be more workforce development but I don't know how... so I'm working with a young person at the moment and I don't know how that will pan out. She's on tuition and really fearful about going into school fearful because she kind of she's self-aware enough to know that she'll ditch her work find a friendship group and she'll truant and she'll risk take because she's kind of knows that when she gets in those social situations that becomes more important to her than the learning.

[01:08:49.520]
But when she's having tuition she's really knuckling down to the work and she actually wants good things for herself but she knows that she would be easily distracted into not doing that. And I don't know how this one will pan out. How we are going to find some education that meets that meets her needs there's nothing that anyone's immediately been able to go oh this provision would be able to offer her this

[01:09:16.840] Interviewer
there's interesting longer term questions there as well.

[01:09:19.000]
Oh yeah absolutely about how she's going to learn to be able to work in those different ways.

[01:09:25.990]
And yeah and interestin to think whether short term stabilizing and then able to sort of multitask. once one thing's going a bit better for her. But yeah I've had another young person, she was placed in a girls school I thought it was a bad idea if I'm honest, placed in an all girls school. And what she really wanted was to come back to R to be closer to her mum and and to go a pupil referal unit she'd felt that her experience of mainstream had been so difficult that actually she needed a different way of learning and everybody was really reluctant to place her in.

[01:10:10.490]
a PRU. And I'm not saying it's been plain sailing. but in that situation we were able to bring her back to R and to a because that is the big drive as well to bring our young people closer back. So we were able to bring her back. And and for her to be able to attend what not sure if they still call it a PRU they change the name what they think is all the time. It was a provision that we felt had done quite a bit of work with us on emotional coaching and becoming attachment aware I'm not saying they've cracked it but they've done a lot more thinking about how actually they support young people and how the language they use and the head in that setting and said This is what I'm looking for from my staff.

[01:11:05.940]

This is how we talk to young people we talk to them by recognising their emotional needs. That is what I want to see my staff do. And she stood up the beginning of my training and said This is what I expect. what we're learning about today is how I expect us to interact.

[01:11:21.990]
And so there was enough that we felt

[01:11:23.930] Interviewer
that most people took notice.

[01:11:26.400]
I'm not saying that you know.

[01:11:29.130]
I'm not saying that this is an ideal situation, like ideal situation. She'd be in a school an inclusive school but maybe sometimes taking the young person's views you know we could have placed her in a school and what would have happened what was happening in all the other ones further exclusion further confirmation for her of what she said to me which is I'm mad me. Well I'm mad or I'm bad and that's what she was learning from all these experiences. So yeah.

[01:12:04.210]
I think people felt quite uncomfortable when I came back from the meeting and said what she wants is to be in a PRU.. can't do that

[01:12:13.400] Interviewer
do you think that was the hesitance that was was that partly to do with that kind of the tip because the cause proves generally out of place people go when they've been excluded Yeah.

[01:12:31.500] Interviewer
So the very place that people get sent rather than place that people choose to go. Exactly. Do you think that was part of the hesitance. Sort of. But that's not that's not how it works. You don't choose to go to a PRU they're places of punishment. Almost.

Yeah yeah yeah yeah absolutely.

[01:12:49.730]
Yeah yeah. I think that's how people thought about it. And you know and they're a last case and worst case aren't they worst case but actually for her she felt it was a place that she felt she would belong. and whilst that's sad

[01:13:13.480] Interviewer
and maybe the best place at the time.

[01:13:16.460]
So I think you can feel sad about it or you can feel actually placing her in an all girls school where everybody else was doing exactly as they were told she just felt so different. I'm not like any of these people. It's almost like she was saying to me you can tell can't you I'm not like these people what am I gonna do here. It just made her feel so abnormal I guess was how

she was like trying to describe it. And maybe there needed to be more of a middle ground for her somewhere that she felt that she was around other people that were a bit more like her.

[01:13:56.300]
Got a bit more. our looked after children often gravitate towards other looked after children and they don't always know they don't always share with each other that they're both in care. but it does happen often. because that feeling of being so different to those around you that you've got nothing in common with that must be hard musn't it must be a hard way to feel or I think what she felt was that everybody here is better than me which is really sad

[01:14:29.220] Interviewer
Yeah yeah. And to not feel understood I suppose is I suppose it is similar to that to that training that we talked about earlier and wanting to give the teacher a bin bag. Yeah. The idea of nobody nobody around you understanding the fact that you don't quite know what's waiting for you. You get home. Yeah.

[01:14:54.410] Interviewer
We don't know how long we're going to be weight living and stuff that's really difficult for most of us to imagine.

[01:15:03.260]
Yeah. So people's like the defense there is to not think about it isn't it. or What I see is the separating of their experience from why they're doing what they're doing. So that that might have happened but they're choosing to refuse this. They're choosing to be and that narrative is very strong in school. And it's amazing how clear people could be that actually that's got nothing to do with that that they're not connected in any way.

[01:15:31.810]
And and that is about what's some of that about preserving themselves and how they cope with what they're seeing or that government guidance as well which is about managing behaviour as opposed to understanding why people might be behaving as they are.

[01:15:52.500] Interviewer
Yeah. Yeah actually it's it's interesting that there's there's something quite similar going on almost isn't that the young person as a result of uncertainties is acting in a particular way.

[01:16:04.530] Interviewer
And actually the teachers doing exactly the same thing. Yes.

[01:16:07.140] Interviewer
Because their uncertainties around trying to manage the behavior of the class. is pushing them towards This is a choice.

[01:16:16.080]
Yeah it's yeah. Yes.

[01:16:22.140] Interviewer
We're so so that's an interesting example of when some when some of these views have been kind of taken seriously I suppose. Do you get a sense just from. It doesn't have to

be even from direct casework. But do you get a sense of how much those views are used and how much not

[01:16:54.540]
I think like I said in the care system young people want to go home and they can't

[01:17:03.680]
And so I think that probably is a real difficulty for social workers isn't it that the views that young people might share and sometimes the view would be I don't want to be in this care placement. And it is difficult to understand what that might be about. But ultimately is that underlied by I want to be. if I just keep every care placement failing I can get back eventually they'll just give up and put me back with my parents. I don't know that's a conscious decision but just that they're uncomfortable in all those places. so I think there's often the sense in the care system that young people feel they're not being heard.

[01:17:47.890]
It's very difficult to go with what actually they do want. because a lot of them have come from really quite dangerous situations and educationally sometimes young people have very strong views on it about what they want or don't want most of them don't want to learn, alot of the time. Maybe it's, I don't mean they don't want to but actually they've not been experiencing it as a positive.

[01:18:20.860]
And so perhaps they're quite shut off from education. but that's absolutely not the case for all looked after children we've got. But I guess the ones that I might be involved with obviously I'm involved where there's an issue. so there's loads of looked after children making great progress and all the rest of it and having a brilliant experience with their carers. the ones I'd be most connected with. are ones where there's an issue. So the advisor in the office says I don't know what to do, What should I do in this situation.

[01:18:50.590]
What should I do. And Yeah do I think their views acted upon?.

[01:19:01.720]
I guess the situation is it varies.

[01:19:04.030]
It depends sometimes children are in a place of self destruct that they might not identify. But what others have seen others are seeing a pattern that when you're in the midst of it and your overwhelmed by everything that's going on you don't notice that pattern. So you know our virtual head will often get young people ringing up and saying now then P. I don't want to go to that. I told you about this. This is what I want. I want it to go like this and then I want that to happen and that to happen.

[01:19:41.760]
And you know these young people that he's known for a long time are ringing up and telling him what he wants.

[01:19:46.800]

And he'll go out and listen to them see see what can happen but what sometimes people want and what is available. It's not always able to happen.

[01:20:01.690] Interviewer
So this is the value in terms of engaging with what other people do what is the value there actually in the process of validating and listening to what they want more than matching the outcome.

[01:20:16.460]
Yeah absolutely. That's what I believe essentially about the impacts of emotion coaching. You're not changing the outcome of a situation when when you're emotion coaching somebody. If a young person forgets their slip and they can't go on a trip so you know the outcome would be the same taking a punitive approach with that young person or taking an emotion coaching approach. they can't go on the trip but you can change the difference of how somebody feels about that and you can show them how adults can respond or how it means to be a human being with others in a respectful way.

[01:20:52.730]
And so I think actually anybody in any situation that experiences the true value of listening. That's a really it's a really beneficial experience isn't it. we've been doing these coaching workshops with work. and the trainer ask the question at the end to the people who'd been having the coaching. When was the last time you were listened to like that. everyone was like I don't know if I have been so it's something that not enough of it happens.

[01:21:28.630]
People aren't recognizing that actually the value of of that we can't change all the situations. but Young people are unlikely to open up about the things that they find difficult unless they start to see that listening. Having someone listen to you can be a really helpful thing. I mean I've kept.

[01:21:47.350]
Talking about what they want as an outcome I absolutely don't think it is about that. It is about somebody saying God that must have been awful, being in isolation every day. That must have been really hard for you. How did it feel when you were in that situation.

[01:22:06.560]
someone taking an interest in them like that. It's very different isn't it to just go where you go and do that.

[01:22:15.170]
So yeah I absolutely believe.

[01:22:19.880]
The vaue is in the process

[01:22:22.020] Interviewer
So the real outcome is maybe changing their view of adults, maybe changing their view of adults.

[01:22:30.710]

I think that's the pressure I take in with me, it isn't the pressure of saying finding out what they think about everything and that's why I actively dislike cognitive assessments. I don't go in thinking that I want to find out as much as I can about this young person. I think I often go in thinking I want this to be a nice experience for this person. How can we spend some nice time together. And obviously you know there needs to be some kinds of outcome from the EP perspective.

[01:23:02.180]
but The outcome for the young person should be more that it was OK to spend time with that person that there was some positive value in it as well. So I guess my supervisor when I first started as an EP said that our role is about just helping people think differently, you don't need to solve the situation you should go away from that situation with them feeling somewhat better, that the idea that people feel somewhat better so I guess that's obviously the same working with young people. not another example of a professional that's a dick I guess.

[01:23:48.250] Interviewer
That might be a good quote. No, well that's that's wonderful. I don't have any other questions other than just to ask. How you found the experience of being interrogated about what you do with young people.

[01:24:36.010]
I enjoyed the experience. Yeah I guess it was an experience for me of being listened to which was nice. And yeah I think your questions were really interesting. Sort of probed more into the background ideals behind it as well. And yeah it's nice to reflect on it because I guess a lot of the time the experience of being an EP is just quickly solve this do some things right.

[01:25:06.690]
You know it was meant to be reflective professionally yet. Check your e-mails and do this kind of do that.

[01:25:13.150]
So yeah it's nice to be able to reflect on those things that I think that may come when we get a chance have these conversations about what we think about them. And I guess that ultimately there isn't right or wrongs for it. Because it's because we're working with individuals. It's not like right or wrong but it's nice to be able to reflect on anything.

Appendix H – Example data coding & theme generation
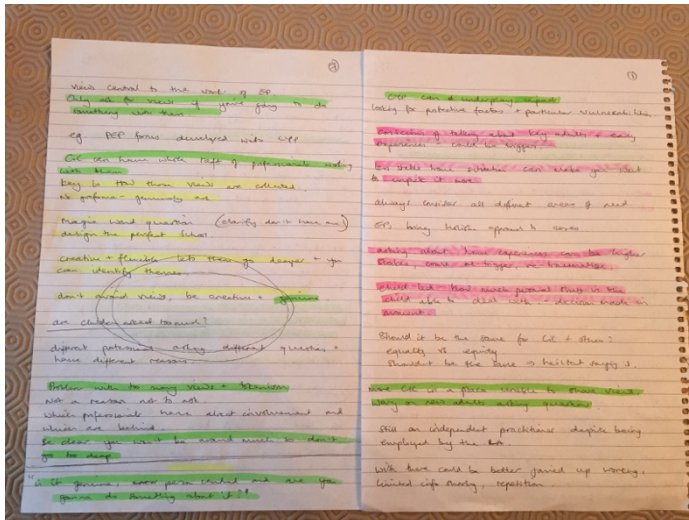
The coding process was conducted using the transcripts to aid familiarity with the data and the audio files to allow engagement with the emphases given by participants. Colour coding was used to group related codes and begin theme generation.
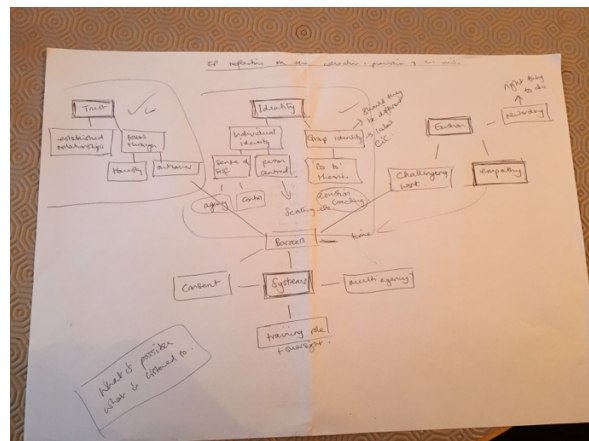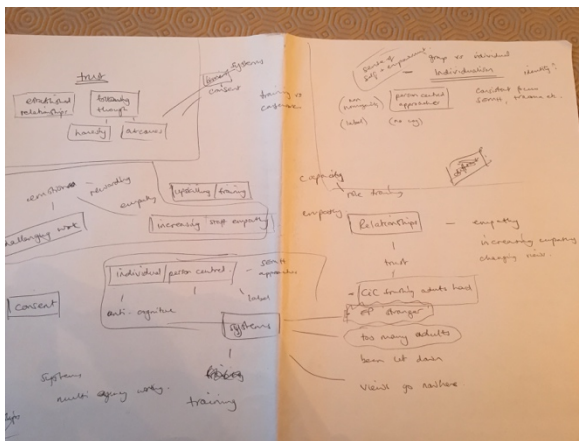
Related codes were grouped together and overarching themes to capture the codes were developed.
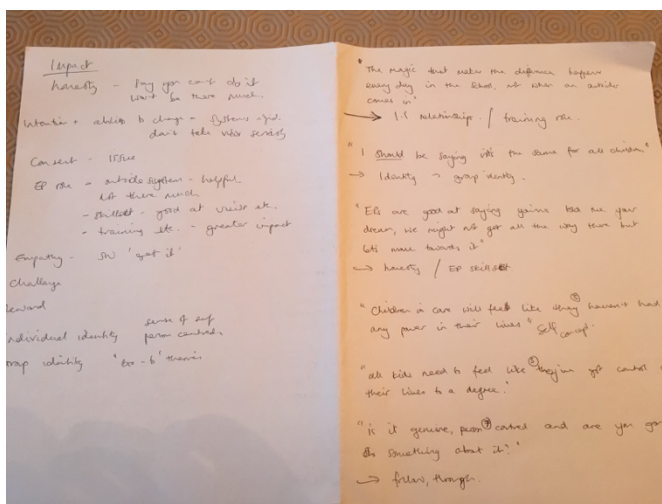
Once the meta-themes, themes and sub-themes had been established, quotations to illustrate subthemes were identified by revisiting the audio files and transcripts.