What do looked after children and young people (LACYP) identify as the key protective factors that promote their school engagement?

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Abstract

Background:

A positive correlation exists between a strong educational foundation for looked after children and young people (LACYP) and psychological functioning that persists well into adulthood. Whilst risk factors and poor outcomes are well identified for LACYP, protective factors that promote school engagement for this population are not as well documented. Resilience-based research indicates that protective factors at the individual and environmental levels have a mitigating effect for high-risk children.

Aims:

The current research aims to present the voice of LACYP relating to their perception of the key protective factors that promote their school engagement at the individual, family and school/community levels. Findings from both the literature review and empirical study are then used to inform a protective factors framework to aid carers and professionals to support this population with school engagement.

Sample:

Eight LACYP in year groups 5-8 were chosen to participate in the research. The literature review identified a gap in the research pertaining to the views of younger school-aged children.

Method:

The literature review identified eleven key studies in total. Only qualitative studies were included as the research aim was to gain the views and experiences

2

of LACYP. Thematic Synthesis, a qualitative synthesis approach was adopted for data analysis.

A qualitative design was also employed in the empirical study, in which semi-structured interviews were conducted using adapted Person Centred Psychology (PCP) tools to elicit the personal constructs of each child interviewed.

Results:

Reflexive Thematic analysis yielded four overarching abstract themes, each with three descriptive themes (interpreted as protective factors). The four abstract themes that inform a framework for key protective factors for LACYP are: 'A Supportive Learning Environment', 'Caring Adults', 'Belonging' and 'Skills for Life'.

Conclusion:

The range of protective factors identified is consistent with the view that LACYP who have faced complexity and challenge e.g. high levels of stress and adversity, require multiple protective factors and therefore a broad spectrum of family, school and community support.

Comment:

Key limitations of the study include a small sample size, lack of prolonged field engagement and the broad nature of the study. Future research could explore a specific aspect of school engagement, to enable a more in-depth study of the relative impact of protective factors.

Thesis impact statement

When undertaking research, it is important to reflect on the underpinning motivation. This ensures that there is an ethical thread running throughout the research. Of the seven common motivators outlined by Barker et al. (2002), 'desire for professional and social change' bridges the gap between research and practice. This impact statement aims to reflect on the gap in research identified and share the potential benefits of the findings, using effective dissemination.

Whilst there is a wealth of literature on professional views of 'what works well' for LACYP to promote positive school engagement, the voice of LACYP is not always prioritised. The current study was therefore designed to hear the voice of LACYP relating to their perception of the key protective factors that promote their school engagement at the individual, family and school/community levels. Findings were then used to inform a protective factors framework to aid carers and professionals to support this population with school engagement. The research is therefore of benefit to staff, carers, EPs and other professionals working with LACYP, helping to inform practice and reflections on the appropriateness of provision for LACYP, including how such provision could be enhanced by focusing on the key protective factors identified by LACYP themselves. Qualitative research of this nature offers an opportunity for LACYP to be active agents in their lives by identifying their own facilitators to school engagement.

The literature review mainly synthesised the views of older students in care and care leavers, identifying a clear gap in the research pertaining to the views and experiences of younger school-aged LACYP.

4

A strength of the empirical study is the focus on hearing the voice of a small sample of school-aged LACYP and using the findings to inform a protective factors framework. The framework presented is not intended as a list of stable factors, but a potential flexible structure to aid EPs in their work with LACYP. Promotion of positive school engagement can have a beneficial impact on wellbeing and achievement, with potential societal and economic implications.

The range of protective factors identified is consistent with the view that children and young people who have faced high levels of stress and adversity, require multiple protective factors and therefore an extensive range of family, school and community support. In effect, complex problems require complex solutions and relational ruptures require a sustained relational approach to promote healing.

A second contribution of the study relates to an exploration of the protective factors that promote school engagement for LACYP at the individual level. Emphasis often seems to be on what adults can do to nurture protective factors for LACYP and less so on what LACYP identify as being within their control and agency.

The current study provides an opportunity for the dissemination of the protective factors framework by EPs, which can be shared with schools and professionals. This could help to identify areas of strength and development for LACYP, across the eco-systemic levels, to help shape a bespoke plan of support. Such a framework could act as an example of early intervention (focusing on prevention rather than amelioration of risk factors) and could be shared with other professionals e.g. specialist teachers and social workers, to build capacity,

thereby increasing reach and impact. Crucially, the framework should be informed by child voice.

The current study has formed a foundation for future research in the area. Such research could break down the multi-faceted construct of school engagement and focus on specific components that are easier to operationalise e.g. a sense of belonging. Research could also include larger numbers of participants, prolonged field engagement and employ a longitudinal design, to provide a rich picture of how LACYP's views about key protective factors that promote school engagement change over time.

The researcher plans to disseminate findings from this study by submitting the research to a relevant academic journal for publication and presenting key findings at university and service conferences. The sharing of the protective factors framework with the virtual school team will enable reflection on potential applications and dissemination to designated teachers.

Table of contents

9

List of appendices

List of tables

List of figures

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15

Part 1 Introduction

1.1 Rationale

A positive correlation exists between a strong educational foundation for looked after children and young people (LACYP) and psychological functioning that persists well into adulthood (Pecora, 2012). However, LACYP are likely to experience particular barriers to educational engagement due to their in-care status. For example, the psychological effects of adversity, high mobility and the socio-economic context of pre-care experiences (Berridge, 2017). Poor outcomes for LACYP has prompted a number of changes to legislation and informed statutory guidance, for example 'The Children and Social Work Act' (2017).

Whilst risk factors and poor outcomes are well identified for LACYP, protective factors that promote school engagement for this population are not always as well documented (Neal, 2017). Rutter (1985) explains that protective factors at the individual and environmental levels have a mitigating effect for high-risk children. A focus on protective factors is particularly salient, as these are amenable to adaptation, unlike the multiple risk factors many LACYP experience. Educational psychologists (EPs) are well placed to support schools and carers to identify and promote protective factors for the LACYP in their care at both an individual and systems level. The growth of community psychology is providing increased opportunities for EPs to engage in such work.

Like resilience, school engagement is a complex construct with three dimensions: emotional, cognitive and behavioural. Similarly, school engagement relates to how the individual interacts with their environment. International data indicates

16

that LACYP have consistently and qualitatively lower school engagement and academic achievement levels than their peers (Wise et al., 2010).

The positive correlation between high levels of school engagement, attendance, emotional connection and achievement and the fact that school engagement is such a challenge for many LACYP, provides a clear rationale for a focus on school engagement in the present study. Furthermore, schools can be easier to regulate than less formal contexts, as staff and structures can be more amenable to change and development (Leonard & Gudino, 2016).

Whilst there is a wealth of literature on professional views of 'what works well' for LACYP to promote positive engagement and life outcomes, the voice of LACYP is not always heard above such advice (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2018). The right of LACYP to be heard has become a fundamental element of much child-centred legislation in the UK, influenced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

The current study aims to hear the voice of LACYP relating to their perception of the key protective factors that promote their school engagement at the individual, family and school/community levels. Findings are then used to inform a protective factors framework to aid carers and professionals to support this population with school engagement.

The research explored in the literature review led to the identification of the following three research questions:

1) What do LACYP identify as the key protective factors that promote their school engagement at the individual level?

2) What do LACYP identify as the key protective factors that promote their school engagement at the family level?

3) What do LACYP identify as the key protective factors that promote their school engagement at the school/community level?

The researcher has a long-held interest in the promotion of positive educational outcomes for LACYP, having sat on both adoption and fostering panels in their capacity as an educational psychologist (EP). Additionally, the researcher has been a designated link EP for the area virtual school and completed a variety of work to support LACYP at both an individual and systems level. The current focus of work is the provision of foster carer consultations and the facilitation of complex case consultations with virtual school staff. The risk factors, adverse experiences and entrenched difficulties faced by some of the LACYP discussed can lend itself to a problem saturated narrative. Complex case work has led to an interest in identifying and promoting protective factors for this population, to help shift the narrative to a more positive one and focus on factors that are amenable to change.

1.2 Theoretical considerations and values

The voice of the child

Mayall (2002) champions children as more than passive recipients of a received knowledge and more than 'social actors' who have a right to participate. Instead they are viewed as 'social agents' who can influence the world around them and make a difference.

> *"The silenced are not just incidental to the curiosity of the researcher but are the masters of inquiry into the underlying causes of the events in their world."*
> (Stevenson, 2014, p.23).

The benefits of eliciting pupil voice are well documented. They include higher self-determination, increased engagement and feelings of initiative, choice and control over learning (White & Rae, 2016).

The Department for Education guidance 'Promoting the education of looked after and previously looked after children' (DfE, 2018) encourages schools to understand the importance of listening to and acting upon the child's wishes and feelings about education. EPs have a broad range of methods for eliciting child voice. However, this extends beyond 'capturing' the voice of the child as if disembodied from the interaction with the EP and learning context. EPs can facilitate the expression of voice to include active decision-making (Hart, 1992).

In her review of forty-four peer reviewed articles (2002-2008) eliciting the perspectives and experiences of children in care, Holland (2009) identified a lack of research with younger children. The major methodological difficulty noted was the lack of space for children and young people's (CYP) individual constructs to be expressed, as opposed to the use of pre-defined rating scales. Although personal construct psychology (PCP) is often associated with therapeutic use, it is utilised as a research methodology in this study and a tool to elicit the personal constructs of LACYP. PCP is acknowledged variously as a form of constructivism (Burr et al., 2012), in which "events are construed through a system of meaning that each individual builds." (Burr et al., 2012, p. 2).

The researcher's view that meaning making is firmly located in a social context i.e. the children's cultural, social and linguistic environment (rather than a closed loop) has led to the identification of social constructivism as the theoretical framework that underpins this research. The researcher's epistemological

position reflects the view that LACYP's personal constructs are informed by their lived social experiences and therefore contextually bound.

1.3 Methodological approaches

To address the three research questions, this exploratory study seeks to elicit the views and experiences of LACYP and is therefore a form of qualitative research. Qualitative research seeks to provide a rich picture of complex situations, to elucidate a person's perception and experience of events and hear the voice of those who are not always heard (Sofaer, 1999).

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain a rich picture of LACYP's views and wishes. The aim was to address a gap in the research by listening to the voice of school-aged LACYP regarding key protective factors that promote school engagement at the individual, family and school/community levels. Much of the existing research in this area is focused on the views of older students in care and the retrospective views of care leavers.

Robson (2002) outlines the compatibility of qualitative methods with a social constructivist methodology. The emphasis on human meaning making influenced decisions to use open-ended questions in conjunction with drawings, encouraging the sharing of constructs via a comfortable medium that also enabled in-depth exploration.

Personal construct psychology (PCP) is a naturalistic theory which acknowledges the reciprocal influence between researcher and participants. According to Ravenette (1980), eliciting a construct and its opposite promotes a 'polarity of thinking', which illuminates a child's personal constructs when the researcher explores what each construct represents and denies.

The semi-structured interviews therefore used adapted versions of the Salmon line (Salmon, 1988) and Ideal School technique (Williams & Hanke, 2007), based on PCP, to gather the views of LACYP regarding key protective factors that promote school engagement at the different eco-systemic levels.

This research required a qualitative method of analysis that could identify patterns from children's self-reported personal constructs regarding school. Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) was selected. The flexibility of ReflexiveThematic Analysis enabled analysis within a framework of PCP techniques, whilst facilitating the identification of new data.

1.4 Overview of the thesis

The thesis includes a systematic literature review, an empirical paper and a critical appraisal of the research, each of which will be summarised in the remainder of the introduction.

1.4.1 Systematic literature review

The purpose of the review (part 1) is to present literature pertinent to the review question and provide context for the study. This review seeks to highlight key protective factors that promote school engagement for LACYP. Only qualitative studies were included. Eleven studies in total were identified for review. The overlap of looked after children and young people's (LACYP) views and experiences across the eleven key studies was amenable to a qualitative synthesis approach; Thematic Synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

The synthesis of views expressed in the key studies highlights the following areas of importance (abstract themes): 'Stability and Support', 'Belonging' and 'Know the Child'.

21

The review also demonstrates that school engagement is in itself a key protective factor for LACYP and an alternative source of resilience; yet despite its heightened importance for this population, many LACYP face multiple and complex demands within the school environment. Qualitative research therefore offers an opportunity for LACYP to be active agents in their lives by identifying their own facilitators to school engagement.

Limitations of the review and implications for future research are considered.

1.4.2 Empirical paper

The review mainly synthesises the views of older students in care and care leavers. There appears to be a clear gap in the research pertaining to the views and experiences of younger school-aged LACYP. Gaining the views of younger school-aged LACYP regarding the protective factors that promote their school engagement therefore forms the basis of the empirical study.

The aim of the research was to hear the voice of school-aged LACYP using approaches that would enable a rich picture of their views. A qualitative design was therefore adopted in which semi-structured interviews were conducted using adapted PCP tools to elicit the personal constructs of each child interviewed. Eight children were interviewed in total (in addition to the child interviewed during the pilot study). The methodological approach was informed by the theoretical paradigm and epistemological position outlined above – social constructivism.

The empirical paper outlines study design, measures used, qualitative analysis methods chosen and ethical considerations. Finally, findings are presented and then explored in the context of relevant research in the discussion section.

Reflexive Thematic analysis yielded four overarching abstract themes, each with three descriptive themes (interpreted as protective factors). The four abstract themes are: 'A Supportive Learning Environment', 'Caring Adults', 'Belonging' and 'Skills for Life'.

The range of protective factors identified is consistent with the view that children and young people who have experienced trauma and adversity, require multiple protective factors and therefore comprehensive support at the family, school and community levels (O'Higgins et al., 2017).

1.4.3 Critical appraisal

The final part of the thesis (part 4 - the critical appraisal) extends the findings of the empirical paper, enabling a greater reflection on the implications of the research and a critical appraisal of the research conducted. Firstly, reflections on epistemology, including the researcher's epistemological position are outlined. This is followed by an exploration of the rationale of the design, measures and methods of analysis chosen, with a reflection on strengths and limitations, including a consideration of alternative approaches. This is followed by a reflection on the credibility of the research and ethical considerations that arose during the research process. Implications for understanding and knowledge in educational psychology are then explored, followed by implications for EP practice and future directions for research. Finally, there is a reflection on contributions to the research base, ending with a personal reflection on the research process.

Part 2 Review paper

2.1 Introduction and structure of the literature review

The purpose of the chapter is to present a systematic review of literature pertinent to the review question and provide context for the study. The focus of the review question on views and experiences led to the inclusion of qualitative studies only. Eleven studies were identified in total for review. The overlap of looked after children and young people's (LACYP) views and experiences across the eleven key studies was amenable to a qualitative synthesis approach. The purpose of the synthesis was to interpret as well as integrate findings, with a view to developing a protective factors framework for LACYP. A Thematic Synthesis approach was therefore chosen (Thomas & Harden, 2008), based on Braun & Clarke's (2006) Thematic Analysis approach to qualitative analysis, but applied across multiple studies. The aim of developing a protective factors framework is to aid professionals and carers to support LACYP with school engagement.

The relative strengths and critiques of the key studies are discussed separately to the presentation of themes, to allow a more fluid discussion of themes within the synthesis. A qualitative critique of each study was undertaken using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist and the guidelines provided in Brantlinger et al. (2005). The weight of evidence (WoE) framework (Gough, 2007) has been used to give a detailed overview of the studies, so the reader can make an informed judgement regarding their credibility and dependability.

This review seeks to highlight key protective factors at the child, family and school/community levels that promote school engagement for LACYP. The

synthesis of views expressed in the key studies highlights the following areas of importance: 'Stability and support', 'Belonging' and 'Know the child'.

The review also demonstrates that school engagement is in itself a key protective factor for LACYP and an alternative source of resilience; yet despite its heightened importance for this population, many LACYP face multiple and complex demands within the school environment. Cognitive, social and emotional demands can be amplified by factors such as the impact of adverse experiences and high mobility. Qualitative research therefore offers an opportunity for LACYP to be active agents in their lives, by identifying their own facilitators to school engagement.

Finally, limitations of the review and implications for future research are considered.

2.2 Context of the Review

Outcomes for LACYP

Concern regarding the educational and broader life outcomes of LACYP, is well documented: They are less likely to gain five passes at GCSE and enter higher education (O'Higgins et al., 2015; Pecora, 2012). LACYP are also over-represented in the unemployed and homeless populations (Davison & Burris, 2014). Whilst there are no simple causal attributions, there is an acknowledgement that being in care (including pre-care experiences), is accompanied by a number of risk factors which increase the probability of poor life outcomes, both educationally and in later life. Examples of such risk factors include trauma (Welbourne & Leeson, 2012), number of homes (Jones et al., 2011) and special educational needs (O'Higgins et al., 2015). A child is defined

as 'looked after' when they have been in the care of the local authority for over twenty-four hours (Children Act, 1989, section 22).

Whilst risk factors and poor outcomes are well documented for LACYP, this review seeks to illuminate the key protective factors that promote school engagement for this population. In their longitudinal study, Goemans et al. (2018) identified school engagement as a key area of focus for LACYP, as it can mitigate some of the negative effects of family instability, promoting emotional wellbeing and achievement.

Ungar and Teram (2005) explain that if research does not include the voice of the child/young person, one is "violating them through methodologically flawed and contextually irrelevant interpretations of their worlds" (p. 149). This review is therefore qualitative in nature and focuses on hearing the voice of looked after children and young people.

The review will therefore attempt to answer the following question:

'What do LACYP identify as the key protective factors that promote their school engagement?'

2.3 Overview of the review

Section 2.4 aims to outline the need for and purpose of the review. Section 2.5 seeks to develop an understanding of the national and legal context of the research question. Section 2.6 explores the theoretical context including exploration and appraisal of key concepts such as protective factors, school engagement and attachment and trauma. Section 2.7 outlines the rationale for the research question, whilst section 2.8 presents associated ethical considerations. Section 2.9 provides an account of the methods used to carry

26

out the literature search, including scope and limits. The qualitative method of analysis for the in-depth review (thematic synthesis) is outlined in section 2.10. Section 2.11 seeks to provide a critical appraisal of the key studies, both in terms of relevance to the review question and methodologically. This is informed by the weight of evidence framework (Gough, 2007) and qualitative checklists. Themes derived from the thematic synthesis (presented as protective factors) are then explored in section 2.12. Section 2.13 aims to integrate theory and research, synthesising findings from the literature review and implications for practice. Section 2.14 presents a protective factors framework taken from the findings. Finally, conclusions are set out in section 2.15, exploring limitations of the review, an overview of findings and recommendations for future research in the area.

2.4 The need for and purpose of the review

A positive correlation exists between a strong educational foundation for LACYP and psychological functioning that persists well into adulthood (Pecora, 2012). This suggests that although school engagement is important for all children, it is of paramount importance for LACYP. However, LACYP are also likely to experience particular barriers to educational engagement due to their in-care status e.g. the psychological effects of adversity, high mobility and the socio-economic context of pre-care experiences.

International data also suggests LACYP have low school engagement levels and achieve poor academic achievements due to factors such as the impact of adverse experiences and lack of placement stability (Wise et al., 2010).

The increased prevalence of social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulties for many LACYP (due to early attachment and trauma experiences)

contributes to high school exclusion rates, limited school engagement and poor academic outcomes (Berridge, 2017).

Such findings provide a clear rationale for establishing key protective factors to support the school engagement of LACYP. The focus on protective factors is particularly salient, as these are amenable to adaptation, unlike the multiple risk factors many LACYP have experienced e.g. parental substance misuse and emotional abuse.

Whilst there is a wealth of literature on professional views of 'what works well' for LACYP to promote positive engagement and life outcomes, the voice of LACYP is not always heard above such advice (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2018). This is of particular concern, as LACYP are a vulnerable and arguably marginalised group. The right of LACYP to be heard has become a fundamental element of much child-centred legislation in the UK, influenced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

Children are therefore viewed as 'social agents' who can influence the world around them and make a difference (Mayall, 2002). In their systematic review of interventions to support LACYP in school, Liabo et al. (2012) note that none of the studies included asked the participants about their desired outcomes for interventions or involved them in the design aspects of the research. They conclude: "Clearly there is room for collaboration in this field" (p.350).

2.5 The National and legal context of the review

Poor outcomes for LACYP have prompted a number of changes to legislation and informed statutory guidance, for example 'The Children and Social Work Act' (2017). In 'Promoting the education of looked-after and previously looked-after

children' (2018), there is clear guidance aimed at local authorities and virtual school heads in fulfilling their duties as corporate parent (a collective responsibility to provide the best possible care and safeguarding of children). This includes providing access to high quality education and nurturing a climate of high academic expectations, fostering educational aspirations for the future. Such aspirations may not always be present for LACYP, especially when they have experienced multiple placements and carers.

The guidance also encourages approaches that emphasise relationship building and a child-centred approach to learning, promoting self-esteem and an understanding of emotions. The section designated to mental health acknowledges the range of social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) issues LACYP may experience compared to their peers and explores the adverse effects on school engagement and wellbeing.

One of the clear recommendations is for schools to work with partnership agencies to support LACYP with complex emotional needs. EPs are cited as the first example of professionals who can offer this crucial support, as their application of psychology is accessible to all schools as a form of universal support.

2.6 Theoretical context of the review

In order to address the research question, it is essential to give a critical account of key concepts presented within the review. These include protective factors within the resilience literature, school engagement and attachment and trauma:

2.6.1 Introduction to Resilience and Protective factors for LACYP

Resilience has become an increasingly popular term within education and child welfare research, with a multitude of definitions. Rutter (2006) defines resilience as:

> *"An interactive concept that is concerned with the combination of serious risk experiences and a relatively positive psychological outcome despite those experiences."* (p.2).

Protective factors are presented as potential buffers that can mitigate some of the worst effects of chronic adversity (Dent & Cameron, 2003). In this way, they can alter future trajectories for those exposed to multiple risks.

> *"A protective factor may influence, modify, ameliorate or alter how a person responds to the adversity that places them at risk of maladaptive outcomes."* (Rutter, 1985, p. 268).

The number of risk and protective factors present for children is not the only relevant factor, the complexity, duration, frequency and the developmental stage of the young person are also highly pertinent (Werner, 1990). Similarly, protective factors are not simply the obverse of corresponding risk factors. Some factors can either be conceived as risk or protective, depending on context e.g. being in care is often viewed as a risk factor but may also be a protective factor for children with turbulent and traumatic backgrounds.

Many researchers view resilience and protective factors through an ecological lens (Garmezy 1991; Masten 2014; Werner 1982). This relates to an understanding that protective factors operate at multiple levels, including individual, family and community. Ungar (2011) is particularly interested in the interaction between the child and their environment. He expressed the view that research should focus on the ecology of the child first, then the interaction between them and finally on the child. Implicit to such an understanding is the

need for strong links and collaboration between the different systems. This is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) eco-systemic theory, which locates the child within multiple spheres of influence, emphasising the inter-relationship between each one, to optimise development.

The ecological view of protective factors lends itself to a compensatory model:

> *"If a child's major risks lie in the family system, such as growing up in an abusive home, many of the factors identified as protective will derive from the school or community environments."* (Benard, 1991, p.10).

This observation is based on the idea that protective factors found in the family environments of resilient young people, are reflected in the protective factors found in school e.g. warm and nurturing relationships (Benard, 1991).

A common denominator amongst resilience theorists is the protective factor of strong and supportive relationships underpinning healthy adaptation (VicHealth 2015). Rutter (1985) conceptualises this as maternal and sibling warmth and a positive family atmosphere. He also identifies the key protective factor of school at the community level. The central importance of these two protective factors for children is outlined by Masten et al. (1999) in their longitudinal research pertaining to the impact of psychosocial disadvantage. Masten et al. (1999) found a positive correlation between secure attachment, effective schools and childhood resilience. The high value of common and familiar routines led to her construction of resilience as 'ordinary magic' (Masten, 2001).

A summary of universal protective factors for children, outlined in the Public Health England document, 'The mental health of children and young people in England' (2016, p.5) is presented in appendix 1.

As much resilience literature is based on correlational data, it is difficult to establish the causal relationship of various protective factors. Although the underlying mechanisms and differential impact of the protective factors explored in this study cannot be explicated fully, LACYP in the key studies are clear that they promote a 'positive outcome,' specifically in the domain of school engagement.

Rationale for a focus on Protective factors

The nature of protective factors as prospective and preventative is more likely to promote wellbeing than a focus on eliminating risk (Benard, 1991; Newman, 2002). This may be particularly pertinent to the LACYP population, as many children have already been exposed to multiple risks and persistent adversity.

Neal (2017) claims that research around LACYP is replete with negative outcomes and less focused on solutions and protective factors. Rutter (1985) explains that protective factors at the individual and environmental levels have a mitigating effect for high-risk children. This idea is echoed by Afifi and Macmillan (2011) within the context of child maltreatment:

> *"Focusing on protective factors … can inform the development of interventions aimed at reducing impairment following exposure to child maltreatment."* (p. 267).

Protective Factors and School

A common understanding amongst resilience researchers is that a focus on one protective factor to the exclusion of others, risks leading to an inadequate intervention with a single focus e.g. a bullying program (Ungar, 2011). This reflects the complexity of children's experiences and the multi-dimensional nature of resilience. Minnard (2002) therefore advocates broad school-based support

that addresses multiple factors such as supportive relationships and academic and social competence.

Schools can act as 'havens of respite' for children in care. School and spare time activities are described as the ideal contexts to promote self-esteem, self-efficacy and a secure base (Gilligan, 2000). The school community can give vulnerable children a strong sense of belonging, which enhances their motivation and wellbeing (Glover et al., 1998). Activities that give children responsibilities can also foster a sense of belonging (Benard, 1991).

School and spare time experiences can also promote protective factors at the individual level, as school and community-based activities promote skills such as problem-solving, planning and goal setting (Benard, 1991).

Protective factors for LACYP

Luthar et al. (2006) call for research to focus on specific groups of children, as resilience is bound to the individual context of the child. LACYP are one such population.

Werner (1982) expresses the view that young people who experience a high level of stress or adversity, require multiple protective factors or processes in their lives. Although many resilience researchers discuss the 'steeling effects' of low-level stress (Rutter, 1985) and uphold the concept of 'self-righting' for the majority of children, there is an understanding that this is not always possible in the face of chronic adversity or trauma. Resilience is therefore a key concept in child protection.

In their mixed methods literature review of protective factors for children in care, Zabern and Bouteyre (2017) identify seven main factors. They highlight the

33

importance of regular contact with birth family, self-esteem (inextricably linked to other factors), a warm and stable environment, social support, less exposure to childhood trauma, engagement in extra-curricular activities and investment in schooling. They conclude:

> *"School is one of the main protective factors highlighted in this systematic review, on account of the well-being it generates and the opportunities for success."* (p. 11).

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE, 2015) have produced a list of eight non-exhaustive quality statements, which are based on researched protective factors for LACYP. The eight quality statements are child-centred and embrace an integrated approach, with the aim of delivering high-quality care for LACYP:

Table 1

List of quality statements for Looked-after children and young people (NICE, 2019)

Statement one	LACYP experience warm, nurturing care.
Statement two	LACYP receive care from services and professionals that work collaboratively.
Statement three	LACYP live in stable placements that take account of their needs and preferences.
Statement four	LACYP have ongoing opportunities to explore and make sense of identity and relationships.
Statement five	LACYP receive specialist and dedicated services within agreed timescales.
Statement six	LACYP who move across local authority boundaries continue to receive the services they need.
Statement seven	LACYP are supported to fulfil their potential.
Statement eight	Care leavers move to independence at their own pace.

Many of the statements relate to protective factors across the different levels: individual, family and school/community. For example, warm and nurturing care is as much the remit of school as it is the foster home or care placement

(statement one). Similarly, school can play a key part in helping LACYP explore and make sense of their identity and relationships (statement four). Education can also act as a gateway to services and promote meaningful collaboration (statement two).

The quality statements above are wholly compatible with the universal protective factors outlined in appendix 1. This suggests that protective factors for the general child population can be applied to children in care. However, the importance of context also suggests that there are likely to be modified and additional protective factors for this vulnerable population. Luthar et al. (2006) explain that although lists containing stable variables (protective factors) can be useful starting points, they should not be applied in a blanket fashion, due to the contexts of specific populations.

2.6.2 School Engagement

School Engagement Definition

Like resilience, school engagement is a complex construct. Research refers to three dimensions: emotional, cognitive and behavioural. The emotional aspect relates to positive and negative responses to tasks, staff and peers. Such responses may include anxiety, boredom or motivation. There is a high degree of cross-over between the motivational literature, school belonging and emotional engagement (Fredericks et al., 2004).

Cognitive engagement encompasses the use of strategies and approaches to learning, which may include self-regulation, embracing challenge and strategic thinking. The concept is connected to the level of effort exerted and is also linked

to the comprehension of complex ideas, thus sharing similarities with the metacognition literature (Fredericks et al., 2004).

The behavioural aspect of school engagement relates to observable levels of participation in both academic and extra-curricular activities, including attendance. One can therefore see that school engagement is a broad term, which is why Fredericks et al. (2004) suggest that it be viewed as a meta-construct, which integrates all three aspects. There is a strong relationship between the three dimensions e.g. a reciprocal relationship between behavioural and emotional engagement.

Two main outcomes of school engagement are outlined by Fredericks et al. (2004), based on correlational data. High levels are shown to promote stronger academic outcomes and improve attendance (drop-out rates). There is a particularly strong correlation between achievement and behavioural engagement, demonstrated in a longitudinal study which shows that low levels of participation early on have an enduring impact on achievement (Alexander et al., 1997). Furthermore, disengagement from school has negative implications for well-being across the life-span (Johnson et al., 2001) and can impact on behaviour and substance misuse (Li & Lerner, 2011).

There is a high level of crossover between research on the foundations of school engagement and protective factors. Levels of school engagement are higher in schools with clear support structures, challenging lessons, caring teachers with clear expectations, peer acceptance, consistent goals and a school community that promotes a sense of belonging (Newmann et al., 1992). The importance of

giving choice, collaboration between staff and pupils and authentic learning tasks are also highlighted.

Resilience emerges from engagement in ordinary adaptational systems such as schools, described as 'safe harbours' (Masten, 2001). Antecedents to school engagement can also be found at the individual and family levels and can therefore be conceptualised as protective factors. Like resilience, school engagement relates to how the individual interacts with their environment. Leonard and Gudino (2016), suggest that as the school environment is easier to regulate than other contexts, it is a good venue for intervention, providing a clear rationale for a focus on school engagement.

School engagement and LACYP

As explored in the introduction to this review, international data indicates that LACYP have consistently and qualitatively lower school engagement and academic achievement levels than their peers (Wise et al., 2010, p. 6). Wiegmann et al. (2014) conceptualise the low school engagement of LACYP as: high drop-out rates, low grades, chronic absence and lateness. Berridge (2017) suggests that the socio-economic context of children's pre-care lives, in addition to the emotional turbulence they have experienced, influence learning and school engagement.

Parental involvement in education has been demonstrated to be a more influential factor on success than poverty, school environment and the influence of peers (HM Govt., 2005, in Lonne et al., 2008, p. 49). It is therefore common for the education of LACYP to be disrupted before they even enter care e.g. those who have experienced neglect or trauma within their family.

37

According to the Department for Education (2018), three out of five LACYP have special educational needs (SEN), including learning and social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. SEMH difficulties, which may include poor emotional regulation and the processing of trauma, contribute to poor academic outcomes, school exclusion and limited school engagement (Berridge, 2017; Blome, 1997).

Once placed in care, the high mobility experienced by many LACYP, including changes of home and school placements, disrupt the adult and peer relationships that support educational engagement. Such disruption can be further compounded by poor communication across services e.g. education and social care (Mendis et al., 2018).

Consistent school engagement is identified as a key protective factor for children in care because it can mitigate some of the negative effects of family instability, promoting emotional wellbeing and achievement (Goemans et al., 2018). In their findings, Pears et al. (2013) document that high levels of emotional engagement act as a protective factor for children who have experienced maltreatment, improving academic outcomes. However, their findings also suggest that lower levels of emotional engagement are found in children in foster care. This disparity highlights the importance of promoting a strong sense of belonging and emotional ties with school for LACYP.

School engagement – A critique

Although conceptualising school engagement as a meta-construct can be helpful, it also raises the possibility that it is so inclusive, it is hard to define as a distinct concept. This is due to the high degree of overlap with similar constructs e.g. motivation and metacognition. This is compounded by the fact that many school engagement tools only measure one or two of the three dimensions (Fredericks et al., 2004). Similar to the resilience literature, it is also difficult to establish causality when looking at antecedents to school engagement. This could be due in part to a lack of longitudinal research in the area. Correlations might suggest a reciprocal relationship between concepts, but do not establish causality.

Fredericks et al. (2004) ask a series of key questions that need to be addressed by future research:

> *"Are dimensions of school engagement additive? Does one or more compensate for a lack of others… Are aspects of context more important among some age groups than others?"* (p.83).

Research on school engagement therefore needs to move beyond the study of homogenous populations to specific groups of children, to see what works well for whom and how key factors interact.

Fredericks et al. (2004) therefore call for more qualitative research in the area of school engagement, in order to better understand the phenomenological aspects of the construct for specialised populations. This could include LACYP. They also call for research that seeks to identify the impact of factors found at the family and community levels on school engagement.

One can see that there is a strong reciprocal relationship between school engagement and resilience. Although school engagement is presented as an

outcome in this review, it is also recognised as an antecedent or protective factor that promotes resilience.

2.6.3 Attachment and Resilience

Many of the approaches and interventions advocated to promote the emotional wellbeing and resilience of LACYP are informed by attachment theory (Bowlby, 1980). After all, attachment theory examines the basis for human security by transcending within-child factors, to examine the impact of the environment e.g. early care-giving relationships, which can be so disrupted for LACYP. This is compounded by broken bonds and separations due to multiple placements when in care (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015). Benard (1991) reflects on the link between attachment theory and resilience: "The 'sense of basic trust' identified by Erickson (1963), appears to be the critical foundation for human development and bonding, and, thus, human resiliency." (p. 11)

Although the exact mechanisms by which this occur are not clear, it is thought that children develop internal worldviews or 'blueprints' of relationship expectations based on their experiences with primary caregivers (Fonagy et al., 1994).

A secure attachment provides the child with skills in emotional regulation (self-soothing), reflective capacities, trust and resilience (Fonagy & Target., 2000). Such internalised skills and capacities may be vital when managing adverse life experiences, or even life's ordinary challenges e.g. learning and peer interaction (Dent & Cameron, 2003). LACYP with insecure attachments, some of whom may have experienced neglect or maltreatment, are likely to be more sensitised and therefore vulnerable to small stressors that trigger higher cortisol levels (Kertes et

40

al., 2008). Minnard (2002) makes an explicit link between such stress responses and their interpretation as 'anti-social behaviour.' Such behaviour can hinder learning by reducing acceptance by teachers and peers or limiting opportunities for classroom participation, impacting on school engagement.

'Attachment aware' schools promote principles including sensitive attunement, consistency, emotional containment and the provision of a safe and predictable learning environment (Bomber, 2007). This is achieved through various means such as nurture groups (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000), safe spaces and key adults. Integral to such approaches is seeking to understand the meaning of children's behaviour, rather than taking it at face value (Geddes, 2006).

In her critique of attachment theory, Slater (2007) suggests a paradigm that incorporates the principles that underpin attachment theory, but also seeks to circumvent the determinism that can be associated with it (Smith et al., 2017). She proposes a 'developmental pathways' approach (based on Bowlby, 1988), suggesting that EPs help to create learning environments in which a number of positive pathways are available to vulnerable children, despite traumatic experiences. Positive experiences e.g. activities that foster a sense of belonging and the development of social relationships, may constitute turning-points in which LACYP can re-establish a positive trajectory (Gilligan, 2000; Rutter, 2012).

This is similar to the resilience literature, which discusses the importance of promoting multiple protective factors in children and young people's lives (O'Higgins et al., 2017). Multiple and complex challenges require multiple points of intervention/protective factors. Slater (2007) emphasises the importance of

listening to the voice of LACYP to establish the barriers and enablers to such pathways.

Trauma and school engagement

Interpersonal childhood trauma refers to exposure to any abuse, neglect or maltreatment (Bucker et al., 2012). LACYP who have experienced persistent trauma inflicted by the caregivers they are meant to trust, is referred to as complex trauma.

LACYP who have experienced complex trauma can appear disengaged in the classroom, due to poor emotional regulation and inhibitory control (Pears et al., 2010). Their sensitivity to low stress situations can also contribute to difficulties with concentration, so that survival supersedes learning. High cortisol levels found in children who have experienced chronic adversity/trauma are linked to poor executive functioning, impacting on all domains of school engagement (Wagner et al., 2016). Such difficulties are compounded by the sensory processing issues experienced by children with a history of complex trauma, although the sensory domain affected is likely to be dependent on the type of maltreatment experienced i.e. abuse or neglect (Howard-Hiles et al., 2020).

Additional areas of difficulty resulting from trauma include self-concept and cognition. High mobility after placement in care and removal from home can become additional traumatic experiences that compound the effects of trauma (Child Welfare information Gateway, 2015). Clemens et al. (2017) suggest that a lack of understanding of the effects of trauma by school staff can also exacerbate its impact and lead to further poor educational outcomes. Furthermore, schools

can act as a venue for unconscious triggers to traumatic memories e.g. smells, words and topics of study.

A strong link therefore exists between trauma and educational barriers that hinder school engagement. LACYP are most likely to experience such complex trauma (Salazar et al., 2012).

2.7 The Review Question

If research does not include the voice of the child/young person, one is "violating them through methodologically flawed and contextually irrelevant interpretations of their worlds" (Ungar & Teram, 2005, p. 149). This review is therefore qualitative in nature and focuses on hearing the voice of looked after children and young people (LACYP).

Additionally, the context presented calls for a systematic approach to establishing the key protective factors that promote the engagement levels of LACYP, contributing to better educational and broader life outcomes.

The theoretical, national and legal context explored have led to the formulation of the following review question:

'What do LACYP identify as the key protective factors that promote their school engagement?'

The nature of capturing the views and experiences of LACYP lends itself to a systematic review of qualitative studies. This is because the aim of qualitative research is to produce a comprehensive picture of complex views and perceptions and hear the voice of those who are not always heard (Sofaer, 1999). However, the aim is not to 'capture' views in an objective sense, as there

is an acknowledgement that the researchers in each study have co-created meanings with their participants and through their analysis of data. The synthesis of what are judged salient themes within the literature adds another layer of interpretation, all of which seek to create meaning.

2.8 Ethical considerations

The aim of exploring the views of a vulnerable group raises a number of possible ethical issues, regarding for example: ethical sensitivity (Lepper, 1996), informed consent, confidentiality and power relationships. Such considerations will be at the forefront of the critical appraisal for each study. Both epistemological and ethical considerations emphasise the importance of viewing LACYP as active participants in the endeavour to understand what promotes school engagement, as opposed to passive beneficiaries of an accrued knowledge (Winter, 2006).

2.9 Literature search

Literature search procedure

The review question was refined using an iterative process of searching databases and refining search terms. The databases PsycInfo, Web of Science and ERIC were searched in April 2020 using the following terms and rationale:

First search terms used:

Table 2

Initial search terms used for literature review

1	2	3
"Looked after child*" "child* in care"	"Protective factor*" Resilienc*	"School engagement" "educational engagement"
"looked after" "foster* care"		

Initial examination of the literature showed that the school engagement and educational achievement of LACYP are intertwined throughout. A decision was therefore taken to use broader and more inclusive search terms. The generic terms 'school/education' therefore replaced 'school engagement/educational engagement' within the literature search. The terms 'school' and 'education' included all references to the latter, as they were more inclusive in scope. The new search terms detailed below were therefore used in April 2020 and in an updated literature search in January 2022.

New search terms used:

Table 3

Literature review search terms

1	2	3
"Looked after child*"	"Protective factor*"	School*
"child* in care"	Resilienc*	Education*
"looked after"		
"foster* care"		

Inclusion criteria

The PICo model (Joanna Briggs Institute, 2014) enables the researcher to formulate a clear review question and forms the basis for inclusion and exclusion criteria. The focus differs for a qualitative review. 'Population' is relevant to both quantitative and qualitative reviews. 'Phenomenon of Interest' relates to the experiences of the focus population, which may include views and beliefs that hold meaning for them. Lastly, 'Context' relates to the binding of experience e.g. over a specific time-period or social setting. 'Outcome' is not relevant to a qualitative review due to the focus on the experiences of the participants. The researcher has added further inclusion criteria relating to the period of

publication, language of the study and study design, to aid replication of the

literature search process.

Table 4

Inclusion Criteria informed by the PICo model (Joanna Briggs Institute)

Population	LACYP or former LACYP
Phenomenon of Interest	Views on protective factors that promote school engagement. Views are identified as attitudes, opinions, beliefs, feelings or experiences
Context	Experience of school from reception year to leaving age
Published	After 1989 (The year the Child Protection Act was passed – a major piece of legislation relating to the care of LACYP)
Language	In the English language and relating to an OECD country
Study Design	Empirical studies only (no literature reviews or 'grey literature'). Qualitative peer reviewed studies. Methods for collecting views have to include in-depth or semi-structured interviews, focus groups or another qualitative method aimed at eliciting views.

The review includes only peer reviewed empirical studies. However, an

extensive grey literature exists which explores the views of LACYP e.g. the work

of charitable organisations. One example includes the NSPCC publication

'Achieving emotional wellbeing for looked after children – a whole system

approach' (Bazalgette et al., 2015). Life story interviews were conducted with

twenty care-experienced children and young people (CYP). The importance of

giving young people voice and influence was underscored. The Coram

publication 'Our lives, our care' (Selwyn et al., 2018) is another example of

qualitative research conducted with LACYP. Six hundred and eighty-six LACYP

across six Welsh local authorities completed a survey examining multiple areas

of their lives including friendships, relationships with carers, the natural world, support for learning and contact with birth family members. The presence of trusted adults, positive friendships, family time and the importance of involving young people in decisions was emphasised.

Studies exploring the views of young adults who were formerly 'looked after' have been included in the review. Although these participants no longer attend school and are therefore distant from their school experience, 'views' incorporate more than current experiences and it can be argued that temporal distance from school provides a greater capacity for reflection on factors that promote school engagement. Within this review, the term LACYP therefore incorporates young adults who were formerly 'looked after', in addition to those currently in care.

To be selected as a key study, the study needed to make reference to resilience and/or protective factors within the introduction and discussion sections. Studies also needed to give an educational context for inclusion, exploring factors that promote school engagement for LACYP. However, overt reference to the term 'school engagement' was not required for inclusion. Reference to any of the recognised components of school engagement was required e.g. cognitive, emotional and behavioural facets of engagement. During the iterative search process, it became evident that school engagement was often presented alongside and within the context of academic achievement.

The literature screening process is represented in a PRISMA flow diagram (appendix 2) and mapping table (appendix 3), detailing articles selected for full analysis. Ten studies were identified for review during the literature search in April 2020. An additional article (Francis et al., 2021) was identified as meeting

the inclusion criteria during the updated literature search in January 2022, yielding a total of eleven key studies for review.

2.10 Qualitative synthesis approach

The overlap of LACYP views and experiences across the eleven key studies lends itself to a qualitative synthesis approach more helpfully than discussing each study separately. The purpose of the synthesis is to interpret as well as integrate findings, with a view to developing a protective factors framework for LACYP. A thematic synthesis approach was therefore chosen (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

Thematic synthesis uses an approach applied to the analysis of primary qualitative studies – Thematic Analysis. However, it is noteworthy that in their 2008 study, Thomas and Harden (2008), dispensed with their a priori framework (barriers and facilitators to healthy eating), in favour of establishing what 'emerged' naturally from the data. This review has adopted a similar approach with an attempt to respect the methodological foundations of each individual study within the synthesis (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007).

The Thematic Synthesis approach allows analysis to be kept close to the original studies, by generating codes within the results/findings section of each article, leading to the identification of descriptive themes. These themes are then translated into abstract (superordinate) themes, with increasing layers of interpretation, creating new perspectives.

The researcher is active within the process, which is recursive rather than linear i.e. coding each data item separately (the findings section of each individual article) and moving back and forth between the data set (the findings section of

48

all articles), refining codes throughout. The codes evolved i.e. some were split into more codes and some collapsed with other codes. Themes were then identified. The analysis was inductive in approach, as there was no a priori framework e.g. relating to protective factors. A research decision was taken to generate themes from the data itself rather than super-impose categories, consistent with the researcher's epistemology. Translation of themes into protective factors occurred only after the thematic synthesis was complete.

2.11 Critical Appraisal

Qualitative critical appraisal tools used

The relative strengths and critiques of the key studies will be discussed separately to the presentation of themes, to allow for a more fluid discussion of themes within the synthesis. A qualitative critique of each study was undertaken using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist and the guidelines provided in Brantlinger et al. (2005). The weight of evidence (WoE) framework (Gough, 2007) has been used to give a detailed overview of the studies, so the reader can make an informed judgement regarding their credibility and dependability, rather than to discredit or discount studies, consistent with the focus of the review question. Discarding viewpoints due to 'a lesser score' in methodological quality (WoE A) is not compatible with the aim of seeking to interact with the views and experiences of participants. Table 5 gives an overview of the aggregated weight of evidence score for each study (WoE D). Appendix 4 provides a detailed breakdown of the criteria used to judge weight of evidence A (methodological quality), B (relevance of methodology) and C (topic relevance) for each study.

Table 5

Aggregated Weight of Evidence (WoE – D): Low = 1 – 1.6, Medium = 1.7 – 2.2, High = 2.3 – 3

	WoE - A	WoE - B	WoE - C	WoE – D Descriptor
Dearden (2004)	1.4	1.6	2.6	*1.8 Medium*
Neal (2017)	1.4	2	2	*1.8 Medium*
Berridge (2017)	1.8	2.3	2.3	*2.1 Medium*
Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2016)	1.6	1.3	1.7	**1.5** *Low*
Mendis et al. (2017)	1.6	2	1.7	**1.8** *Medium*
Hojer and Johansson (2012)	1.8	1.6	2.3	**1.9** *Medium*
Honey et al. (2011)	1.4	1	2.3	**1.5** *Low*
Tilbury et al. (2014)	1.8	1.6	2.3	**1.9** *Medium*
Martin and Jackson (2002)	1.8	1.3	1.3	**1.4** *Low*
Hass et al. (2014)	2.2	1.6	2	**1.9** *Medium*
Clemens et al. (2017)	3	2.3	1.7	**2.3** *High*
Francis et al. (2021)	1.8	2.6	2	**2.1** *Medium*

Issues relating to Data Collection

Dearden (2004) and Hass et al. (2014) employed a deductive protective factors

framework identified in previous research to inform their questions and data

analysis. Berridge (2017) similarly acknowledged his use of a deductive framework but explained that his analysis also embraced an inductive methodology by ensuring themes were derived from the data and not just interpreted through the lens of pre-formulated theory.

A common finding amongst studies was the sparse information provided on data collection techniques and rationale for use. Transparency would have been enhanced by the sharing of schedules and prompts. Tilbury et al. (2014) was the only study to provide examples of prompt questions. Another notable exception was Clemens et al. (2017) study (WoE A – High), in which the process for each focus group was explained in depth, including the introductory presentation and key transition questions. Emotions and inflections were also transcribed. The researchers reflected on the relative merits and disadvantages of the use of focus groups over interviews e.g. they can enable LACYP to feel more comfortable in a less formal context, but participants can feel constrained by the presence of power dynamics within the group.

Bias and Researcher Reflexivity

A number of studies demonstrated evidence of critical evaluation of potential bias e.g. sample bias, but fewer included researcher reflexivity relating to the formulation of questions and data analysis. Hass et al. (2014) (WoE A – medium) was the only study to acknowledge that choice of questions presupposes certain 'analyst constructed typologies' (Patton, 2002). Berridge (2017) attempted to mitigate any potential bias in his data collection by using two trained and care experienced interviewers, rather than researchers. He also reflected that future research could make use of care experienced youth in the

overall planning and discussion of findings, consistent with the desire of many LACYP for a greater role in decision-making, embracing a participatory action research model.

Mendis et al. (2018) (WoE A – low) presented interviews as collaborative events, which suggests a co-construction of meaning, consistent with the methodology and epistemology of the study – narrative inquiry, based on social constructionism.

Understanding researcher bias is a key part of consensual qualitative research (CQR), the data analysis method employed within the Clemens et al. (2017) study. CQR is described as a rigorous process of independent analysis that leads to consensus: "Every effort was made to avoid imposing meaning onto participants' statements, but instead to stay true to their intended meanings." (p.69). This is consistent with the study's more constructivist epistemology. Researchers identified as European-American women and acknowledged their cultural location as a source of potential bias.

Hojer and Johansson (2013) – (WoE A – medium), acknowledged a low response rate of 14 per cent, which suggests that their sample was not representative. Participants were encouraged to participate by Foster Carers and Social Workers with whom they enjoyed a positive relationship. This may have resulted in a failure to include those with less perceived supportive and positive relationships.

Issues relating to Data Analysis

The following studies demonstrated a lack of procedural rigour relating to their data analysis process and audit trail: Dearden (2004), Neal (2017), Honey et al.

52

(2011), Hojer and Johansson (2013), Tilbury et al. (2014) and Francis et al. (2021). (The first three scored 'low' for WoE A and the latter three, medium). Conversely, Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2016) and Hass et al. (2014) provided a clear record of their data analysis process. Both studies employed a generic qualitative data analysis tool based on Miles and Huberman (1994). The latter described the process in detail, including two coding cycles, independent coding and then reconvening to compare codes and refine coding structure (as a research group). The use of multiple analysts is a clear verification strategy which could be argued to increase the dependability of the study. Berridge (2017), Hass et al. (2014) and Clemens et al. (2017) also employed more than one analyst, as a form of investigator triangulation.

Confirmability and Contradictory data

A strength of the majority of key studies was the provision of rich illustrative quotes e.g. Francis et al. (2021). This helped the reader to judge whether there was sufficient data to support findings (confirmability). This was less evident in the Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2016) – (WoE A – low) and Martin and Jackson (2002) – (WoE A – low) studies, which tended to refer more to researcher interpretation than original data. This makes it hard to judge the degree to which the voice of the LACYP included in the studies is fully represented. A lack of thick description also makes it hard for the reader to determine the degree of transferability to other contexts. However, the interviews conducted in the Martin and Jackson (2002) study were in depth, averaging between two to three hours. Nine of the eleven key studies were based on interviews. The exceptions were the Clemens et al. (2017) and Honey et al. (2011) studies, which employed focus groups and open-ended questionnaires respectively.

Five of the key studies made reference to contradictory data: Berridge (2017), Mendis et al. (2018), Clemens et al. (2017), Honey et al. (2011) and Francis et al. (2021). This tended to be in the context of some LACYP expressing a desire for a high level of support, whilst others emphasised a wish not to be treated differently. In the latter study, some children expressed fear of losing friendships during transition, whilst others framed the transition as an exciting opportunity to make new friends.

Prolonged Field Engagement

Hojer and Johansson (2013) (WoE B – medium) incorporated a follow-up component to their study by using telephone interviews. However, the purpose was not clear i.e. whether they served as a form of respondent validation, emotional checking-in, prolonged field engagement or a combination of the three. Clemens et al. (2017) included member checking 'to confirm the accuracy of findings.' Their analysis of additional non-verbal information e.g. drawings, also served as a form of data triangulation.

Francis et al. (2021) used a Participatory Action Research (PAR) model, which included three phases: 1) LAC in primary school interviewed for 45-60 mins, 2) LAC participated in a 'Listening to LAC' conference. This included gathering views and attending resilience building workshops 3) 50 per cent of the LAC interviewed previously received a follow up interview when in secondary school. This study therefore demonstrated the most robust example of prolonged field engagement and therefore scored 'high' on WoE B – relevance of methodology. No other key study demonstrated a form of prolonged field engagement, scoring either 'low' or 'medium' for WoE B (appendix 4).

Epistemology and Ethics

With the exception of Clemens et al. (2017) and Mendis et al. (2018), it was difficult to judge congruency between the philosophical perspective of the researchers and the research methodology. This was due to a lack of reference to the epistemology that underpinned each study and difficulty locating the researcher theoretically. However, data analysis approaches provided clues. For example, Berridge (2017) made reference to wanting to remain as close as possible to the participants' voice, suggesting a constructivist or subjectivist theoretical underpinning.

Each of the key studies appeared to have engaged in valuable research, affording weight to existing bodies of research in the area. Resultant frameworks can be used to assess the presence of protective factors for LACYP and inform future interventions (Berridge, 2017, Dearden, 2004 and Hojer & Johansson, 2013 – all of which scored 'high' for WoE C, topic relevance). The recommendations based on research can also be used for policy development to mitigate some of the effects of trauma and promote school engagement (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2016 and Mendis et al., 2018). Hass et al. (2014) and Clemens et al. (2017) also make the point that their recommendations for school and community settings are not limited by administrative barriers to service delivery, as they are based on the voice of LACYP, rather than professionals operating within service constraints.

The valuable research aims and findings from each study could be viewed as satisfying the ethical principle of 'goodness' (Ryan et al. 2007). Regarding ethical considerations, it may be useful to refer to Rest's (1982) model of ethical

practice. Although studies were high in regard to ethical motivation, with clear

positive intent to promote LACYP's school engagement, issues relating to ethical

implementation and sensitivity e.g. informed consent and confidentiality were

often not explicit. This was the case in the following studies: Dearden (2004),

Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2016), Hojer and Johansson (2013) and Martin and

Jackson (2002), all of which scored 'low' for WoE B. This is perhaps surprising,

given that LACYP are a potentially vulnerable group and power dynamics could

have a particularly detrimental effect. The need for special consideration when

working with vulnerable populations is outlined by Sellman (2009) e.g. in-built

opportunities for young people to provide feedback on processes.

Neal (2017) (WoE B – medium) and Francis et al. (2021) (WoE B – high)

demonstrated ethical rigour by considering process consent and assent, as well

as initial informed consent. In the former study, protocols were given to

professionals who knew the LACYP well, to avoid the posing of potentially

insensitive questions. The research model employed by Francis et al. (2021)

enabled any issues identified by LACYP e.g. bullying, to be followed up

immediately with social workers and the virtual school team. The use of care-

experienced interviewers in the Berridge (2017) study (WoE B – medium) was

designed to reduce demand characteristics of the interview situation.

Researchers also avoided delving too deeply into early family experiences, to

avoid causing potential distress.

Topic relevance

Despite a low WoE – A score (methodological quality), the Dearden (2004) study

scored the highest for topic relevance (WoE – C). It explored protective factors

from an eco-systemic perspective. Dearden (2004) also focused on LACYP who were still at school. This was also the case for Honey et al. (2011) (WoE C – high), Tilbury et al. (2014) and Francis et al. (2021) (WoE C – medium). Berridge (2017) attained a high score for topic relevance with a clear focus on protective factors at all ecological levels. Only two key studies focused on the multiple aspects of school engagement (Hojer & Johansson, 2012 and Tilbury at al., 2014), both of which attained a high score for WoE C. As stated in the literature search procedure (section 2.9), school engagement and the educational achievement of LACYP are intertwined and sometimes conflated in the literature.

2.12 Thematic Synthesis

2.12.1 Codes, descriptive and abstract themes

Analysis of the eleven key studies generated ten descriptive themes, which are divided into three overarching abstract themes: 'Stability and Support,' 'Belonging' and 'Know the child' (a thematic map is presented in appendix 5). See the thematic synthesis table for a visual summary of the spread of themes across studies (appendix 6).

Table 6 illustrates the initial codes identified from the thematic synthesis and how these led to the identification of the ten descriptive themes and finally, the three overarching abstract themes.

Table 6

Codes that informed the descriptive and analytic themes within the synthesis

Abstract Theme	Descriptive Theme	Code
Stability and Support	Supportive Adults	Part of the family
		I can be myself/be accepted
		Genuine care/warmth

		Strict but fair
		Spend time with me
		Feels safe with them
		Need to listen
		Need to be sensitive
		Show they care
		Respect my privacy
		Keep everyone in line
		Recognise me as an individual
		There to guide me
		Advocate
	Stability, Structure, Safe Space	Boundaries and structure at home
		Structured transitions
		School as normality
		Limit school/placement moves
		Space to explore loss and trauma
		School as a secure base
		School is where I learn to be calm
	High Expectations and Hope	Foster Carers show an interest in my education
		Teachers push me/believe in me
		School culture of moving to higher education
		Advice/planning for a course/job
Belonging	Friendship and Belonging	Trust
		Stick by me and support me
		I belong/am accepted (school)
		Fear of abandonment by friends
		Not bullied
		Fear of being bullied
		Being with peers who take their education seriously
	Social/Leisure activities and Access to Facilities	Clubs (extra-curricular)
		Places to connect
		Distraction from bad stuff
		Outlet
		Place I can achieve
		Access to books/IT
		Careers advice
		Access to funds and transport

	Turning-Points	Moving to a better foster home
		New school is a second chance
		Not rejected
Know the Child	Personal Qualities	Love of Learning
		Perseverance
		Goal-oriented
		Autonomy
	Influence of Birth Family	Make them proud
		Worried about siblings still at home
		Breaking the cycle/resistance
	Tailored Educational Support	Right help at the right time
		Don't treat me differently
		Early Help e.g. learning to read
		Plugging the gaps
		Real/Practical learning
		Flexible learning/differentiation
		Help with social skills
		Non-harsh consistent behaviour management
	Collaboration and Voice	Sharing information
		Having a say and making decisions
		Staff as mediators
		Too many people
		Not being kept in the dark
		Care and Education collaborate

Analytic and Descriptive themes

The following is an exploration of the three overarching abstract themes and ten descriptive themes in depth.

2.12.2 Stability and Support

Supportive adults

Supportive adults are a consistent theme across all eleven studies. For ease of reference, this theme has been divided into 'supportive carers' and 'supportive staff.'

<u>Supportive staff:</u>

In the Dearden (2004) study, all but one participant could name an adult who had supported them. Teachers were cited as professionals who made participants feel valued:

> *"He sat and talked to me. I felt safe for a change, for the first time in my whole life."* (p. 191).

The consistent presence and guidance provided by staff was cited as communicating a genuine care and emotional warmth. Sympathetic teachers also respected participants' wish for privacy, so LACYP had the opportunity to 'feel normal' and recognised as individuals (Berridge, 2017). The importance of teacher sensitivity and avoidance of stereotypes was expressed by participants across all studies. Stereotypes related to low achievement and challenging behaviour.

In the Martin and Jackson (2002) study, LACYP described the importance of 'being listened to' and having a member of staff to understand the basis for their 'resistant and disruptive' behaviours. In their discussion of teachers and school support, LACYP emphasised the importance of consistency within relationships, to gain an appreciation of their 'daily lived experience' and provide emotional support. This was echoed by a participant in the Hass et al. (2014) study:

> *"One teacher you know, that year I was horrible and she didn't treat me any different the next year… she didn't keep judging me on bad, past acts, so that was a huge turning point for me."* (p. 390).

Tilbury et al. (2014) discussed such positive support in the context of promoting emotional engagement at school, with trust as the cornerstone of such engagement. The teacher role was therefore perceived by LACYP as extending far beyond a pedagogic one (Hojer & Johansson, 2013).

61

Designated non-teaching staff were also viewed as vital sources of support within school by LACYP:

> *"I do feel like I belong because when I'm angry someone comforts me; it makes me feel safe."* (Francis et al., 2021, p.47).

<u>Supportive carers:</u>

A recurring theme across all key studies was the importance of having foster carers who treated LACYP as 'part of the family.' Participants discussed the need for a sense of genuine belonging in their foster family, to experience love and unconditional acceptance. This young person made an explicit link between a sense of belonging within a family and educational achievement:

> *"I was treated like one of their own children, so you become part of the family, and when that happens it's easier for you to excel."* (Berridge, 2017, p.90).

A participant in the Dearden (2004) study explained that Foster Carers who had faith in them built up their self-esteem, which gave them hope for the future, including academic aspirations. Participants across all studies spoke of the importance of Foster Carers supporting their education, which will be explored under the theme 'high expectations.' Teachers and Foster Carers were also cited as important sources of social capital, enabling participation in social and academic environments and access to support systems (Hass et al., 2014).

Stability, structure and a safe space

> *"If I went to a different house, I had to go to a different school."* (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2016, p.33).

Participants in this study highlighted that multiple moves served as a huge challenge to school engagement. However, structured transitions were cited as a protective measure, which included aspects such as clear boundaries, schedules, additional classroom support and summer school. Stability was referred to as a

pre-requisite to educational engagement, with structure at home and or school enabling an investment in learning and increased responsibility.

Across studies, participants from chaotic and turbulent backgrounds regarded school as a safe haven or a zone of normality; an opportunity to be free from the 'shame' and stigma of being in care:

> *"I could be with normal people, attend a normal school, have normal classes and see normal friends."* (Hojer & Johansson, 2013, p.29).

The importance of 'normalisation' was expressed across all studies. A stable school and regular school attendance during foster placement changes was emphasised as a protective factor by LACYP in the Martin and Jackson (2002) study. School stability was prized above more intensive but transient therapeutic support by one participant:

> *"…people presume that because children are in care… they should be sent to those therapeutic places… but if they missed two years of school, they can't go back to school…and just carry on."* (p.125).

A participant in the Clemens at al. (2017) study provided a very clear rationale for this belief:

> *"Stability is the biggest thing a child in care desires and school is the most normal it gets for stability…"* (p. 72).

Another participant in the same study explained that multiple school transitions made him feel like "another particle, lost in the dust." (p. 72). One LACYP recommended that all foster children have a designated adult, consistent across placement moves, with a specific remit around school engagement and completion of school. Such a person would act as an anchor and help mitigate feelings of anxiety and desertion. Stability via school engagement was therefore envisioned as a protective factor for LACYP, as well as a desirable outcome.

In more than half of the key studies, LACYP referred to school as a safe space to start to explore and resolve grief, loss and trauma. Exploration of trauma was seen as enabling the 'head space' and motivation to engage in lessons:

> "…when you feel like, constricted inside, you just don't feel like doing anything. I knew I had the ability, but I just didn't care." (Berridge, 2017, p. 91).

Two participants in the Clemens at al. (2017) study explained that such a turbulent emotional state slowed down the learning process and made it extremely difficult to manage the multiple demands of school life, compounding feelings of isolation and failure. School was therefore conceived as a place to learn to regulate emotions ('to be calm and not angry'), not just curricular content.

LACYP in the Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2016) study explained that even if school was not a space to explore trauma, it was a place of respite from the emotional challenges associated with pre-care experiences, a major barrier to school engagement at an emotional and therefore cognitive level.

High expectations and Hope

Ten of the eleven key studies included LACYP who spoke of the importance of foster Carers showing a keen interest in their education and having clear expectations of them. This manifested in both emotional and practical support with school tasks. At the emotional level, participants across studies spoke of their carers having faith in them, helping them to develop faith in themselves. More than this, LACYP valued carers who believed strongly in the benefits of a good education. This translated into clear routines, structure around homework, encouragement and as one participant put it, "a kick up the backside" when needed (Berridge, 2017). The prioritisation of education by adult mentors was a key theme in the Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2016) study. LACYP reported that

adults' authentic belief in the value of education strengthened and sustained their own view of its importance. Without this, they reported feeling lost and unmotivated.

Participants in the Clemens et al. (2017) study also spoke of the power of implicit messages given by their foster carers e.g. a lack of action or provision of information. Such perceived passivity communicated the message that carers held low aspirations and expectations for their success. Teachers were also cited as key figures in communicating high expectations, promoting school engagement:

> *"I honestly feel like my teachers had higher expectations for me than I did of myself."* (Neal, 2017, p. 246).

This translated in teachers 'pushing' LACYP and not lowering their expectations due to their 'in care' status. At a systemic level, participants spoke of the importance of a school culture of moving onto further or higher education and provision of careers advice. Such forward planning provided them with a clear rationale for school engagement (Hass et al., 2014; Mendis et al., 2018; Tilbury et al., 2014).

2.12.3 Belonging

Friendship and Belonging

Participants across all key studies emphasised the importance of experiencing a sense of belonging within school. This was often via the social life of the school and friendship. LACYP spoke of the importance of having supportive friends who stuck by them when times were tough (Francis et al., 2021):

> *"I've got a best friend (she's) like a sister, she gets me and understands what I've been through because I've explained it."* (p. 46).

Participants made a vital connection between friendship and trust (Dearden, 2004). This theme was echoed in other key studies, when participants spoke of friendship mitigating the risk of being seen as 'an outsider' and being bullied (Berridge, 2017).

LACYP in the Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2016) study also spoke of the positive influence of peers, explaining that peer modelling was more potent than adult modelling during adolescence e.g. being inspired by young people investing in their education. This promoted positive school engagement.

Other LACYP spoke of their social connections providing them with the validation and emotional support they so craved – an acceptance that they were 'normal' (Martin & Jackson, 2002; Mendis et al., 2018). Some explained that opportunities to spend time with peers outside of the care system was instrumental to this feeling of normality.

Conversely, those who experienced fear and social stigma from peers reported high levels of disengagement from school (Clemens et al., 2017; Francis et al., 2021):

> *"Then there's this social barrier that's like, I don't really want to be at school. All they're going to do is judge and stereotype me…"* (Clemens et al., 2017, p. 72).

Help with peer difficulties and social skills was therefore appreciated by some participants (Tilbury et al., 2014). The common denominator for participants across studies was the need to feel part of a community, so they could experience an authentic sense of belonging. School was often cited as this very community but could also be perceived as a source of isolation and rejection (Francis et al., 2021), impacting directly on levels of school engagement.

Social and Leisure Activities and Access to Facilities

LACYP in the Neal (2017) study emphasised the importance of access to extracurricular activities at the school and community level. They were viewed by many as protective structures that boosted self-esteem and a sense of belonging e.g. sports clubs and church attendance. Participants spoke of their indirect impact on school engagement due to serving as an outlet for stress and negative energy:

> *"It helped me physically not to be a violent mess."* (p. 245).

LACYP also spoke of clubs as distractions from difficult memories and a safe place to express themselves. Clubs were perceived as far more than the pursuit of hobbies; serving as connections to vital support systems, places of acceptance and opportunities to excel at something positive.

Participants in the Dearden (2004) study expressed frustration at a lack of access to out of school activities such as youth clubs, with only a third of LACYP stating that they had access to such clubs. Young people in the Martin and Jackson (2002) study spoke about the value of having the freedom and support to participate in hobbies in the first place, something many young people may take for granted. They also spoke of the social aspect of extra-curricular activities increasing confidence, a key component of a 'rounded' education:

> *"When people are thinking about education, they should be thinking about developing the whole of that person."* (p.124).

LACYP in the Dearden (2004) study emphasised the need for an even playing field when it comes to access to facilities such as books and ICT. Participants across studies reported variable study conditions within their foster care placements, with some having no access to a computer or homework clubs, due to transport difficulties.

67

Young people also highlighted the importance of funds for additional tutoring if needed, perceiving this as a protective factor for school engagement and achievement (Mendis et al., 2018).

Turning Points

Key turning points in the lives of LACYP are raised in four of the key studies. In the Dearden (2004) study, one young person spoke about his move to a more positive foster placement being a significant event in his life. He explained that his new carers' focus on future planning gave him a sense of direction and helped him feel 'claimed,' boosting his confidence. Another young person in the Berridge (2017) study explained that the fact her foster carers did not reject her after a suicide attempt was the key turning point in her life. She spoke about the importance of being accepted and a need for her life to be important to others, before it could matter to her.

A participant in the Hojer and Johansson (2013) study spoke about the crucial importance of being given a second chance at school after a long period of absence due to depression, bullying and family issues. Without this, she explained that her life would likely have followed a less positive trajectory. Other participants mentioned that a change of school served as a turning point, by offering a sense of belonging and a new platform to build a better life.

> *"I think school has always been for me, like, my safe haven or comfort zone. I always enjoyed reading and being around other people and learning from them. So school I guess, in a lot of ways has been a turning point for me."* (Hass et al., 2014, p. 391).

2.12.4 Know the Child

Personal Qualities

LACYP from the Neal (2017) study highlighted internal characteristics as underpinning their levels of engagement and success. These included a love of learning e.g. reading, being goal-oriented and having lots of determination and perseverance in the face of adversity. A participant in the Mendis et al. (2018) study demonstrated such qualities and an ability to advocate for herself by asking not to leave her school, so she could focus on her exams in Year 12. This led to a radio advertisement for a temporary local placement.

Young people in the same study spoke of their high levels of motivation to engage in education. Education was viewed as a source of power and control and a pathway to economic independence:

> *"I think that… something about education – it gives you legitimacy as a human being… an education is one way of giving you authority."* (p. 117).

Other LACYP described competence at school as a source of positive educational identity, which became integrated into a more general positive self-image. This promoted school attendance and therefore engagement.

Participants in the Hass et al. (2014) study emphasised the importance of personal autonomy. This contributed to a sense of mastery and control over one's environment, including school.

> *"And I was just like, I can't let people control me like this, you know? Like, I got to be in control of myself. And so that was, like, a big turning point."* (p.389).

A young person in the Clemens et al. (2017) study clearly perceived himself as a person with a high degree of self-agency, regardless of his background and experiences:

> *"Because I see myself as a human being who can make a difference… They told me I'm gonna do all this negative stuff. Yeah, I've done negative stuff, but look at the positive I've done."* (p.72).

Influence of Birth Family

LACYP across studies spoke of a motivation to succeed at school that was driven by a resistance to the environment they grew up in. Young people spoke vehemently about "*not wanting to end up like their parents*" (Neal, 2017) and "*breaking the cycle*" (Hojer & Johansson, 2013).

> *"I really hit rock bottom…I'm becoming like my mom… They're supposed to be the example and I was becoming that person and that was when I hit rock bottom and I was just like, alright I gotta change."* (Neal, 2017, p. 245).

LACYP in the Hojer and Johansson (2013) study emphasised the same determination to break the social legacy of their parents, turning years of adversity into a source of resilience. School was highlighted as a medium to achieve a 'better life.' A participant in the Clemens at al. (2017) study reflected on the importance of displaying this better life to the 'next generation', to promote hope.

For other LACYP, the influence of their birth family was directly positive. One participant spoke of a wish to make her mother proud of her and another young person discussed a determination to please his grandparents, by achieving well at school (Berridge, 2017).

Tailored Educational Support

A key theme across five of the key studies was the need for educational support informed by a deep knowledge of the young person: *"The right kind of help at the right time."* (Berridge, 2017)

For some LACYP extra support was valued highly e.g. help to catch up on missed work and use of an exit card to help regulate emotional responses (Berridge, 2017; Hojer & Johansson, 2013). Participants in the Martin and Jackson (2002) study emphasised the importance of learning to read early as a protective factor, which might necessitate extra support for some children. LACYP in this study also spoke of the importance of rewards to promote motivation and engagement, with a particular emphasis on rewards for effort.

A number of young people spoke about the importance of 'plugging the gaps' in the curriculum, due to multiple school moves:

> *"You can't just take somebody in the middle of chemistry and then throw them in the middle of another chemistry class, and they're learning two completely different things…"* (Clemens et al., 2017, p. 72).

Young people in the Berridge (2017) study also expressed the view that extra support can amplify a sense of difference, which is the last thing desired by many LACYP. School was perceived as a place to *'leave troubles behind'* and so reminders of being in care were not welcome. Some participants therefore expressed a preference for universal rather than targeted programmes of support.

This was echoed in the Martin and Jackson (2002) study in which the unintended damage of certain targeted provisions was discussed as potentially stigmatising:

> *"That's a double-edged one, 'cause you don't want to single people out. You have to think creatively about what the individual needs."* (p. 127).

Other young people emphasised the importance of a flexible and differentiated curriculum, with lots of opportunities for practical learning grounded in the 'real world' (Clemens et al., 2017; Tilbury et al., 2014). Such opportunities were regarded as key to positive school engagement. LACYP from both studies also spoke of the importance of flexible school procedures with non-harsh and

71

consistent behaviour management techniques and an emphasis on positive reinforcement.

Collaboration and Voice

The importance of strong communication between home and school was cited as key to school engagement and wellbeing in six of the eleven key studies. This operated at both a systemic and individual level. Participants spoke of the importance of cross-system collaboration between care and education (Clemens et al., 2017). LACYP in the Dearden (2004) study spoke of timely communication at a personal level and the positive impact on emotional regulation:

> *"If anything happened here, school would know about it before I even got there… I might sit out the first lesson and cool down."* (p. 191).

This mediating role was often taken by designated non-teaching staff who would also check in with pupils on a regular basis.

Participants also spoke of the importance of sharing information regarding school progress and care placements, due to the experience of 'not having a say' and therefore having no sense of control:

> *"I was kept in the dark all the time. I had no say about the information that was shared with others e.g. school."* (p.192).

This was particularly difficult for the LACYP who viewed education as a way to exert control in their lives, given their turbulent background and experiences (Neal, 2017).

Participants in the Berridge (2017) study emphasised the importance of teachers giving LACYP a voice and more importantly, involving them in decision making. Participants were also clear that interventions and support should be implemented in consultation with LACYP, as they should be viewed as more than

72

passive recipients of services (Martin & Jackson, 2002). There was also a clear desire for opportunities to provide feedback to school staff (Tilbury et al., 2014). In the same study, LACYP shared their experiences of Personalised Education Plans (PEPs) being developed without professionals listening to their views and collaborating with them.

Collaboration and voice were therefore consistently cited as key protective factors for meaningful school engagement.

2.13 A synthesis of findings from the literature review

The following discussion presents the salient findings from the thematic synthesis and places them in the context of related research, drawing out implications for theory and practice. Each descriptive theme is interpreted as a protective factor and presented separately, to enable a greater depth of exploration:

2.13.1 Stability and Support

Supportive adults

The protective factor 'supportive adults' is presented not only as a source of social capital and consistency, but also a source of respite from the emotional turbulence and trauma experienced by so many LACYP. Such challenges pose as a major barrier to all aspects of school engagement (Salazar et al., 2013).

Fredericks et al. (2003) cite teacher support as positively related to behavioural engagement. However, a reciprocal relationship exists, as teachers appear to 'prefer' pupils who are responsible, able and conform to school rules, rather than those who are more disruptive (Kedar-Voivodas, 1983). The corollary of this

73

could be impactful for those LACYP whose emotional difficulties manifest in perplexing and challenging behaviour.

This suggests the importance of staff training on attachment and trauma and staff being mindful of their own feelings when interacting with those LACYP who display emotionally based challenging behaviours. This is particularly vital as the benefits of emotionally available nonfamilial adults is likely to be more significant for children who have experienced broken family ties (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1997).

One implication is that members of staff are well placed to act as mentors or 'key adults' in the lives of LACYP. Consistency and emotional warmth from a significant adult is strongly associated with positive educational outcomes (Dent & Cameron, 2003; McParlin, 1996). This also highlights the inherent difficulty of short-term interventions that may involve the abrupt ending of relationships e.g. short-term tutoring or transition support (Liabo et al., 2012). Such interventions therefore require careful planning.

The importance of a stable and nurturing home environment for LACYP is communicated strongly by participants. Such stable and caring relationships lay the foundation for children's resilience (Rutter, 1985). In the same way the teacher role supersedes pedagogy, the foster carer provides emotional as well as physical sustenance. A caring relationship is nonetheless a nebulous and potentially complex concept. Further research might seek to unravel certain aspects e.g. expectations and implicit messages given to LACYP.

Stability, Structure and a Safe Space

Participants are clear that school is a place of respite, not just from a turbulent life but from the stigma of being from a 'dysfunctional' family and placed in care.

74

School may therefore be perceived as an intervention in itself by many of the LACYP in this review; a safe place that enhances resilience and promotes wellbeing.

Although school engagement may offer a chance for 'normality' and an escape from an 'in care' identity for many LACYP, it also appears 'risky' for some children. Such risks may include trusting new adults after experiencing broken bonds of trust or being creative in the curriculum when frightened of 'getting things wrong.' The social ecology model of resilience suggests that offering consistent and multiple protective factors at a variety of levels may help LACYP engage more fully with education over time. This is likely to be a slow process, given that LACYP experience additional stressors that may contribute to the effects of complex trauma earlier in life e.g. being placed with strangers in the first instance and high mobility for some.

Given so many potential barriers to school engagement for LACYP, the weight given to structured transitions by participants is perhaps unsurprising. Such structure promotes a degree of continuity and predictability that may help LACYP feel safe and enable them to invest in learning. A positive correlation exists between teachers with clear expectations of academic and social behaviour and school engagement in the general population (Newmann et al., 1992). The voices from this review suggest it is likely that such clarity and consistency is also prized highly by LACYP who may need qualitatively more. Berridge (2017) advocates trauma-informed practice and the provision of adult and peer mentors for LACYP upon their arrival to a new school. However, this needs to be implemented in a sensitive and child-centred way that does not emphasise

difference and therefore increase the chance of stigmatisation (Martin & Jackson, 2002).

High Expectations and Hope

The views of LACYP in the key studies is consistent with the conclusion that raising children's expectations of their educational future is a protective factor that leads to increased school engagement and aspirations (Khattab, 2015). The studies suggest that LACYP internalise messages, both explicit and implicit, which impacts on their academic self-esteem and thus levels of engagement. O'Higgins et al. (2017) demonstrate the importance of high expectations further, by presenting a clear correlation between foster carers' and LACYP's aspirations and educational outcomes. Khattab (2014) suggests that when a disparity exists between a child's high aspirations and a carer's low expectations of them, this can contribute to low achievement.

This finding is consistent with attribution theory (Weiner, 2000), which proposes that a child is likely to be more positively engaged and hopeful when they attribute any perceived failure to a lack of effort rather than ability. If a child perceives themselves as lacking in ability, they are more likely to disengage, due to a sense of hopelessness.

Such findings emphasise the importance of carers and teachers communicating high expectations and avoiding subtle messages that relate to limited ability, rather than the importance of effort. Minnard (2002) therefore suggests that the promotion of education should be a central part of the foster carer's role. This is endorsed by those former LACYP who reported that they appreciated their

carers' prioritisation of education, even when they did not experience a close emotional bond with them.

2.13.2 Belonging

Friendship and Belonging

LACYP across the key studies expressed the consistent view that a sense of belonging and social connectedness is central to school engagement, both emotional and behavioural (Garcia-Reid et al., 2005). Belonging relates to a child's need for acceptance, inclusion and encouragement by others, including teachers and peers (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The voice of LACYP regarding the importance of emotional engagement for school success is consistent with the findings of Pears et al. (2013) and highlights the importance of promoting a strong sense of belonging and emotional ties for LACYP. EPs are able to work at a whole school level to help schools communicate messages of belonging and cultivate an authentic culture of trust. Possible vehicles include systemic work, training or a well-being charter mark.

A spectrum of experiences of peer relationships were reported, ranging from rejection to acceptance (Francis et al., 2021). Rejection and fear of social stigma is connected to low school engagement levels and increased likelihood of school drop-out (Clemens et al., 2017).

Fredericks et al. (2004) suggest that the relationship between peer support and school engagement is likely to be reciprocal, as children who are rejected are less likely to participate fully at school and children less likely to conform to school rules are more likely to experience rejection. LACYP who have experienced complex trauma are more likely to exhibit poor emotional regulation

77

and inhibitory control, affecting their ability to conform to school norms (Pears et al., 2010). EPs are well placed to help schools reflect on and formulate a differentiated behaviour policy for vulnerable pupils with an emotional basis to their behaviour e.g. attachment difficulties and trauma. McParlin (1996), reflects that viewing children's behaviour through a different lens could avoid negative 'labelling' that might compound a poor sense of self. EPs could also provide training and modelling of approaches to emotional regulation such as Emotion Coaching (Gus et al., 2015).

A number of participants reported a positive experience of friendship, which acted as a key protective factor for them at school. This is consistent with the suggestion that the relationship between maltreatment and low self-esteem is tempered by the quality and reciprocity of friendship experienced (Bolger et al., 1998).

Social and Leisure activities and Access to Facilities

The high value placed upon the protective factors 'social and leisure activities' and 'access to facilities' by participants is consistent with the view that they can have a 'transformative effect' by developing social skills, providing social support, structure and purpose, enhancing self-efficacy and promoting a sense of belonging (Gilligan, 2000). This can be achieved via a diverse range of activities e.g. therapeutic animal care, community volunteering, part-time work, creative pursuits and sport. Some LACYP explained that social and leisure activities also act as a welcome distraction from the burden of negative emotions, stemming from loss or trauma.

The importance of social and leisure activities for LACYP is consistent with the research conducted by Mahoney and Cairns (1997), in which the extra-curricular element of behavioural engagement is linked to reduced dropout rates for vulnerable children i.e. exclusion and truancy.

The importance of access to facilities is consistent with findings from the systematic review of interventions to support LACYP in school conducted by Liabo et al. (2012). They note a positive correlation between spending targeted money (via for example tutoring and access to technology) and school attainment and attendance. However, results are more indicative of promising interventions than causal relationships, given the difficulty completing follow-up data.

Turning Points

The range of turning-point experiences expressed by LACYP lends weight to Rutter's (1996) assertion that turning-points are phenomenological, in that an objective event may or may not change a person's life trajectory. It is the meaning afforded to an event that is of vital significance. This is similar to the idea of certain events acting as 'windows of opportunity.' For example, supported and structured transitions that are experienced in a positive way and thus act as protective factors (Masten, 2011).

The phenomenological nature of turning points therefore demonstrates the reciprocal relationship between individual and environmental factors. Drapeau et al. (2007) reflects that the relative influence of individual or environmental factors will change over the life course of the child or young person, depending on their stage of development and life events. As Ungar (2013) observes, turning points often arise due to changes in the social context of the child. Personal qualities

such as motivation can be bolstered or undermined by environmental factors. This highlights the importance of providing 'psychosocial resources' or environmental protective factors to promote the engagement of LACYP.

The types of turning-points experienced by LACYP in the studies are consistent with the three categories outlined by Drapeau et al. (2007): Action – such as change of placement or an accomplishment, relation with an adult – such as that expressed by the young person who experienced acceptance after a suicide attempt and finally, reflection. Reflection is exemplified by the young people who reflected on the significance of school for them e.g. by providing stability and nurture.

2.13.3 Know the Child

Personal Qualities

Autonomy and competence are two key features threaded throughout the studies. Individual choice is a key component of intrinsic motivation, which is related to high levels of behavioural engagement (Stipek, 2002). Berridge (2017) suggests that a strong sense of agency is fundamental to the educational engagement of LACYP. Such agency can be a rare commodity for LACYP, as many experience events over which they have no control.

Fredericks et al. (2004) demonstrate a direct link between a child or young person's perceived levels of competence and school engagement, both behavioural and emotional. However, factors that mediate between such qualities and the school environment remain unclear. The importance of agency is represented in the second of Sugden's (2013) super-ordinate themes: 'School is a place where I can make choices.' The LACYP represented in this study are

aged between eight and nine years, demonstrating that agency is not just important to older LACYP. Young LACYP also discuss a desire to establish control over their learning environment and their future.

Influence of Birth Family

The strong narrative relating to 'resistance' or 'breaking the cycle' by LACYP is consistent with Ungar's (2001) assertion that the identity of many LACYP falls along a complex continuum, with resilient and independent at one end and vulnerable at the other. This may have implications regarding individuals' ability to ask for help and the emotional burden of having a conflicting identity. In his application of a resilience framework, Stein (2006) concludes that the outcomes and trajectories of LACYP after care are connected to whether they perceive themselves as 'moving on,' 'surviving' or 'becoming a victim.'

Professionals therefore need to carefully navigate a course that supports LACYP through the effects of adversity and trauma, whilst also promoting a strong sense of autonomy. This is clearly modelled by LACYP themselves when they speak of drawing upon adverse experiences as a source of resilience. This balancing act is demonstrated in the theme 'tailored educational support.'

Tailored Educational Support

The protective factor 'tailored educational support' exemplifies the foundational importance of 'know the child.' Not only does this refer to meeting the needs of LACYP at their age and developmental stage (Winter, 2006), but knowing that what may be a crucial support to one child might be experienced as stigmatising to another. The only way to establish this personalised knowledge is to listen to the individual voices of the LACYP professionals are working with. This is hinted

81

at in the findings of Liabo et al. (2012), who note that LACYP valued interventions that made them feel special but did not want their peers to know they were in public care.

Strategies and interventions might therefore be conceived as part of a graduated approach to promote the engagement of LACYP. This reflects both a desire for extra support where preferred, but also the wish for universal as well as targeted provision, so as not to amplify a sense of difference. One example might be how to promote school as a 'safe base.' For some children, and at one end of the spectrum, school itself might provide a sense of safety, whilst for others, they might need the provision of a designated sanctuary area and key adult to experience safety and stability. This suggests that provision for LACYP should not be applied in a blanket fashion, but informed by a deep knowledge of each child as an individual.

EPs are well placed to support schools to gain child voice e.g. via person-centred planning tools, decoding behaviour and identifying learning strengths and needs, so provision can be tailored to each LACYP. They can also support schools and foster carers to promote reading via the acquisition of early literacy skills, championed within the Martin and Jackson (2002) study.

The reflection of LACYP in the Berridge (2017) study, that 'teachers are the ones to make the difference,' lends weight to a key recommendation from the NICE guidelines for looked-after children and young people (2015): the provision of teacher training to promote understanding of the impact of stable care and education and the adverse effects of loss and trauma on emotional wellbeing and mental health (recommendation 41).

Collaboration and Voice

LACYP across studies emphasise the importance of not just having a voice, but having their voice heard and then acted upon. This ensures that they are active agents who can exercise control, rather than passive recipients of services (Martin & Jackson, 2002). The protective factor of 'voice' is highlighted in the statutory guidance for the promotion of education for looked after children (DfE, 2018). This guidance underlines the importance of fostering a culture of listening to the views of LACYP in schools and helping other professionals understand the importance of listening to children's wishes and feelings about education.

In their systematic review of interventions to support LACYP in school, Liabo et al. (2012) conclude: 'There is clearly room for collaboration in this field.' (p. 350). This is due to none of the participants (across multiple studies) being consulted about their desired outcomes for interventions or what form those interventions might take.

The high mobility and lack of stability some LACYP experience makes collaboration and communication between services crucial, otherwise the direct effects of disruption are likely to be compounded.

Sarason (1990) summarises the impact of lack of voice on motivation and engagement:

> *"When one has no stake in the way things are, when one's needs or opinions are provided no forum, when one sees oneself as the object of unilateral actions, it takes no particular wisdom to suggest that one would rather be elsewhere."* (p. 17).

The importance of collaboration and voice therefore operate at both a personal and systemic level.

83

2.14 A Protective Factors Framework

A stated aim of the review is to use the findings to inform a protective factors framework that is of particular application to LACYP. However, this is not intended to be a list of stable factors, as resilience is bound to the context of the child/young person (Luthar et al., 2006). Furthermore, protective factors will take on relative significance depending on the age and stage of the child/young person.

As protective factors exist at multiple levels, the framework will present the factors at three levels: individual, family and community/school; consistent with the social ecological view of resilience championed by key researchers in the area (Rutter, 2012; Masten, 2011).

Many of the protective factors from the thematic synthesis appear at more than one level, as simple dichotomies rarely exist. This reflects an interactionist perspective. For example, individual turning-points are often related to environmental safe havens at the family and community levels (Hass et al., 2014).

The analytic theme for each of the ten descriptive themes (protective factors) will appear as a capital letter in brackets next to it. 'S' is 'Stability and Support', 'B' is 'Belonging' and 'K' is 'Know the Child'. Italics indicate protective factors that exist predominantly at one level:

Table 7

A Protective Factors Framework based on descriptive themes from the synthesis

Individual	Family	Community/School
Personal qualities (K)	Stability, structure, safe space (S)	Stability, structure, safe space (S)
Turning-Points (B)	High expectations and Hope (S)	High expectations and Hope (S)
	Supportive adults (S)	Supportive adults (S)
	Collaboration and Voice (K)	Collaboration and Voice (K)
	Turning-Points (B)	Turning-Points (B)
	Influence of birth family (K)	*Tailored educational support* (K)
		Friendship and Belonging (B)
		Social/Leisure activities and access to facilities (B)

A protective factors framework such as this can have practical utility. It can be used as an assessment tool to provide an idea of the most salient protective factors in a child's life and those that have scope for development. It can then be used to inform interventions that increase or optimise protective factors to promote school engagement. Furthermore, there is an inherent logic to children who experience multiple and complex vulnerabilities requiring a multi-pronged collective approach, represented by protective factors at all levels.

Dearden (2004) suggests that such a framework can also be used as an evaluation tool for services and interventions designed for LACYP, by judging

which protective factors the service/intervention enhances or neglects. EPs are well placed to assess, plan and evaluate interventions that embed protective factors, via their understanding of behaviour as communication and the eco-systemic approach they work within.

It may be of practical benefit to analyse the protective factors framework further, by identifying which factors enhance the different aspects of school engagement: emotional, cognitive and behavioural. For example, 'friendship and belonging' promote the emotional aspect of school engagement whilst 'collaboration and voice' promotes the behavioural aspect. However, like most protective factors these two examples cut across the three aspects of school engagement. Promotion of multiple protective factors is therefore likely to foster school engagement at all levels, making for a robust approach.

2.15 Conclusion

2.15.1 Limitations of the review and implications for future research

The weight of evidence framework (WoE C – Topic Relevance) and critical appraisal demonstrate that only a minority of key studies refer explicitly to protective factors at all levels; individual, family and school/community. Similarly, a minority of key studies focus on the multiple aspects of school engagement with many prioritising a focus on academic achievement. Furthermore, the studies that do incorporate multiple levels for protective factors and school engagement do not cross-over with each other. It would therefore be beneficial for future research with LACYP to aim at eliciting which protective factors (at all levels) promote the various dimensions of school engagement. As noted by Fredericks et al. (2004), many school engagement studies tend to be based on homogenous

white middle-class samples, and so there is scope to develop research in this area with more diverse populations, such as LACYP.

The weight of evidence framework (WoE B – methodological relevance) demonstrates that only three key studies incorporated any follow up component or prolonged field engagement within their qualitative research. This would serve to build trust and gain a deeper understanding of LACYP's views on the key protective factors that promote their school engagement. Future research could incorporate more than one visit to elicit the views of LACYP. This might also lend itself to a form of member checking. Future longitudinal research could also seek to clarify if and how key protective factors shift over time.

There is a call for more qualitative research to better understand the phenomenological aspects of school engagement for specialised populations (Fredericks et al., 2004). This review has attempted to synthesise the views of LACYP to this end. However, only four of the eleven key studies had an explicit focus on school-aged children. This means that the synthesis mainly reflects the views of older students in care or care leavers.

The review acknowledges that care leavers are likely to benefit from a temporal distance from school that provides a greater capacity to reflect on protective factors that promote school engagement. However, the views and experiences of school-aged LACYP are somewhat lost, and with them the immediacy and intensity of their current lived experience.

In the future and as a result of this review, it would be helpful to think about how best to elicit the views of school-aged children in care, as this appears to be a

major gap in the research, which Sugden's (2013) study aims to address. He uses creative methods to elicit the educational experiences and views of five seven to eight year olds (not included in this review, as the study is not framed within the resilience/protective factors research).   In her research aimed at obtaining the views of younger LACYP (aged four to seven), Winter (2010) concludes that a number of young LACYP carry with them unresolved feelings of guilt, loss and sadness. She adds that many feel that they are not listened to. Her recommendation is that the gathering of young children's views needs to be embedded systemically in assessment and decision-making procedures.

Clemens et al. (2017) adopts a similar view, referring to limited qualitative research regarding the experiences of LACYP currently in care. She is clear that the active participation of LACYP will create meaningful change via the implementation of 'experience-based' interventions that are not overshadowed by service constraints.

Qualitative research around protective factors could also identify new protective factors that could be included and evaluated in future quantitative studies (Afifi & MacMillan, 2011).

2.15.2 Overview of findings and recommendations for further research

This review seeks to highlight key protective factors at the child, family and school/community levels that promote school engagement for LACYP. The synthesis of views expressed in the key studies highlights the following areas of importance: 'Stability and Support', 'Belonging' and 'Know the Child' (the three abstract themes identified). The findings of this review have significant cross-over with the list of quality statements outlined in the National Institute for Health

and Care Excellence for children in care (NICE 2015). For example, the first three quality standards relate to warm and nurturing care, the importance of collaborative working and the need to listen to the preferences of LACYP, all salient themes within this review.

The review also demonstrates that school engagement is in itself is a key protective factor for LACYP and an alternative source of resilience; yet despite its heightened importance for this population, many LACYP face multiple and complex demands within the school environment. Cognitive, social and emotional demands can be amplified by factors such as the impact of adverse experiences and high mobility. Qualitative research therefore offers an opportunity for LACYP to be active agents in their lives by identifying their own facilitators to school engagement.

The current review mainly synthesises the views of older students in care and care leavers. There appears to be a clear gap in the research pertaining to the views and experiences of younger school-aged LACYP. Gaining the views of school-aged LACYP regarding the protective factors that promote their school engagement will therefore form the basis of the empirical study within this thesis. Creative methods underpinned by psychology will be explored, in order to gain a rich picture of the views of school-aged LACYP. The purpose is not to 'give children voice,' but to ensure that their voice is heard.

Part 3 Empirical Paper

3.1 Introduction

The following section will summarise the key concepts from the literature review and outline the context for the research, including an exploration of the voice of the child and methodological considerations. The research questions and chosen methodology will then be outlined. This includes study design, measures used (including semi-structured interviews and personal construct psychology tools), method of qualitative analysis chosen and ethical considerations. Finally, findings will be presented and explored in the context of relevant research in the discussion section. Strengths and limitations of the study and implications for psychology, educational psychology practice and future research will be presented in chapter four (critical appraisal).

3.1.1 Context of the research

A positive correlation exists between a strong educational foundation for looked after children and young people (LACYP) and psychological functioning that persists well into adulthood (Pecora, 2012). This suggests that although school engagement is important for all children, it is of paramount importance for LACYP. However, LACYP are also likely to experience particular barriers to educational engagement due to their in-care status. For example, the psychological effects of adversity, high mobility and the socio-economic context of pre-care experiences.

Whilst risk factors and poor outcomes are well identified for LACYP, protective factors that promote school engagement for this population are not always as well documented (Neal, 2017). Rutter (1985) explains that protective factors at

90

the individual and environmental levels have a mitigating effect for high-risk children. A focus on protective factors is particularly salient, as these are amenable to adaptation, unlike the multiple risk factors many LACYP experience. EPs are well placed to support schools and carers to identify and promote protective factors for the LACYP in their care.

In their longitudinal study, Goemans et al. (2018) identified school engagement as a key area of focus for LACYP, as it can mitigate some of the negative effects of family instability, promoting emotional wellbeing and achievement. Like resilience, school engagement is a complex construct with three dimensions: emotional, cognitive and behavioural. Ethnographic studies demonstrate a clear link between attendance and high emotional engagement e.g. a sense of belonging. The extra-curricular element of behavioural engagement is also linked to reduced drop-out rates for vulnerable children i.e. exclusion and truancy (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997).

Masten (2001) shows that resilience emerges from engagement in ordinary adaptational systems such as schools, which she describes as 'safe harbours.' Like resilience, school engagement relates to how the individual interacts with their environment. International data indicates that LACYP have consistently and qualitatively lower school engagement and academic achievement levels than their peers (Wise et al., 2010, p. 6). Wiegmann et al. (2014) conceptualise the low school engagement of LACYP as: high drop-out rates, low grades, chronic absence and lateness. Berridge (2017) suggests that the socio-economic context of children's pre-care lives, in addition to the emotional turbulence they have experienced, negatively impact on their learning and school engagement.

The positive correlation between high levels of school engagement, attendance and achievement and the fact that school engagement is such a challenge for many LACYP, provides a clear rationale for a focus on school engagement in the present study. Furthermore, schools can be easier to regulate than less formal contexts as staff and structures can be more amenable to change and development (Leonard & Gudino, 2016).

The literature review highlighted key protective factors at the child, family and school/community levels that promote school engagement for LACYP. The synthesis of views expressed in the key studies highlights the following areas of importance: 'Stability and Support', 'Belonging' and 'Know the Child'.

The review also demonstrated that school engagement is in itself a key protective factor for LACYP and an alternative source of resilience; yet despite its heightened importance for this population, many LACYP face multiple and complex demands within the school environment. Cognitive, social and emotional demands can be amplified by factors such as the impact of adverse experiences and high mobility.

Whilst there is a wealth of literature on professional views of 'what works well' for LACYP to promote positive engagement and life outcomes, the voice of LACYP is not always heard above such advice (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2018). This is of particular concern, as LACYP are a potentially vulnerable group, due to the factors explored above.   The right of LACYP to be heard has become a fundamental element of much child-centred legislation in the UK, influenced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). This has influenced educational psychology practice with an increasing focus on eliciting

the views of children, not only to identify strengths and needs but to inform key decision-making (Woolfson et al., 2008). Qualitative research offers an opportunity for LACYP to be active agents in their lives by identifying their own facilitators to school engagement.

The following section will explore research salient to the 'voice of the child' and LACYP in particular.

3.1.2 The voice of the child

Mayall (2002) promotes a view of children that transcends their mere right to participate as 'social actors'. They are championed as 'social agents' with the ability to influence the world around them.

> *"The silenced are not just incidental to the curiosity of the researcher but are the masters of inquiry into the underlying causes of the events in their world."*
> (Stevenson, 2014, p.23).

Wickenden and Kembhavi-Tam (2014) recognise that children have their own views, which are often distinct from the views of 'proxies,' such as parents/carers and professionals. The ability of children to express their views is presupposed in legislation that enshrines their right to express such views:

> *"Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously…"*
> (Article 12: UN, 1989).

The benefits of eliciting pupil voice are well documented. They include higher self-determination, increased engagement and feelings of initiative, choice and control over learning (White & Rae, 2016). Broader benefits occur at a systems level: School improvement (McBeath et al., 2004) and the promotion of an inclusive learning environment (Messiou, 2002).

Lundy (2007) outlines a model that operationalises each of the components of article 12, in a bid to promote genuine participation and aid professionals such as

93

EPs in their work with CYP. Lundy (2007) explores barriers to the

implementation of article twelve, based on a large-scale audit of children's rights

in Northern Ireland. This included focus groups and interviews with over 350

professionals representing child related organisations and contributions from

1064 school children, using a range of methods. The four elements of Lundy's

(2007) participation model are as follows:

Table 8

Lundy's Voice Model Checklist for Participation

Element	Description
Space	Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views
Voice	Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views
Audience	Ensure that children's views are communicated to someone with responsibility to listen
Influence	Ensure that children's views are taken seriously and acted upon, where appropriate

Lundy (2007) is clear that 'space' must be inclusive and therefore embrace the

voice of all children, not just those who are articulate. This places the

responsibility firmly on adults to adapt methods that enable all CYP to give voice

to their views and participate in a meaningful way.

> *"The child should be asked and consulted in a way and at a level which is commensurate with their conceptual ability and development."* (Maxwell, 2006, p.20).

Despite the legal imperative and compelling rationale to promote pupil voice,

there appears to be a gap between the rhetoric and lived experiences of many

children (Noble, 2003). Stafford et al. (2006) emphasise this point by suggesting

that tokenism is a 'deterrent' to participation, cautioning about the detrimental effects of empty gestures. Gersch (1996) advises that the genuine involvement of pupils is impossible without appropriate vehicles for them to convey their beliefs.

The British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics (2014) outlines four foundational ethical principles upon which a Psychologist's practice should rest. The first, respect, outlines a need for psychologists to consider issues of power, consent and self-determination. The ethical challenges encountered in this study and approaches to mitigate risks will be explored in the methods section.

3.1.3 Methodological considerations when eliciting the voice of LACYP

The Public Health England guidance 'Promoting the education of looked after and previously looked after children' (2018) encourages schools to understand the importance of listening to and acting upon the child's wishes and feelings about education.

In her review of forty-four peer reviewed articles eliciting the perspectives and experiences of children in care, Holland (2009) identified a lack of research with younger children. She also identified limited research with theoretical underpinnings, noting that research with LACYP tended to be more pragmatic and descriptive.

The major methodological difficulty Holland (2009) noted from the literature was the lack of space for CYP's individual constructs to be expressed, as opposed to the use of pre-defined rating scales. This issue could be addressed using Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) tools (Kelly, 1955), which encourage the elicitation of constructs meaningful to the child, rather than providing them with

95

pre-defined concepts that may constrain their thinking. Examples include use of techniques such as the Ideal School (Williams & Hanke, 2007), Ideal Self (Moran, 2001), salmon lines (Salmon, 1988) and repertory grids (Kelly, 1955).

Another of Holland's (2009) key findings was that carers and professionals often have different understandings of important concepts and priorities to those of LACYP. This illustrates the importance of including LACYP in research, consistent with the view of Wickenden and Kembhavi-Tam (2014).

3.1.4 Aims of the study and Research Questions

The current study aims to hear the voice of LACYP relating to their perception of the key protective factors that promote their school engagement at the individual, family and school/community levels. This is based on the premise that research about CYP must include the voice of CYP, otherwise, one is "violating them through methodologically flawed and contextually irrelevant interpretations of their worlds" (Ungar & Teram, 2005, p.149). Findings will be used to inform a protective factors framework to aid carers and professionals to support this population with school engagement. The research should therefore be beneficial to staff, carers, EPs and other professionals working with LACYP, helping to inform practice and reflections on the appropriateness of provision for LACYP, including how such provision could be enhanced by focusing on the key protective factors identified by LACYP. The research explored in the literature review led to the identification of the following three research questions:

1) What do LACYP identify as the key protective factors that promote their school engagement at the individual level?

2) What do LACYP identify as the key protective factors that promote their school engagement at the family level?

3) What do LACYP identify as the key protective factors that promote their school engagement at the school/community level?

3.2 Method

3.2.1 Research Design and Epistemology

In order to address the three research questions, this exploratory study seeks to gather the views and experiences of LACYP and is therefore a form of qualitative research, which aims to explore complex views and listen to a range of voices.

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain a rich picture of LACYP's views and wishes. The aim was to address a gap in the research by listening to the voice of school aged LACYP regarding key protective factors that promote school engagement at the individual, family and school/community levels. Much of the existing research in this area is focused on the views of older students in care and the retrospective views of care leavers.

Robson (2002) outlines the compatibility of qualitative methods with a social constructivist methodology. The emphasis on human meaning making influenced decisions to use open-ended questions in conjunction with drawings, encouraging the sharing of constructs via a comfortable medium that also enabled in-depth exploration of personal constructs. This contrasts with more positivist approaches to data collection, which place emphasis on alignment with an external reality and therefore accuracy, rather than depth of exploration of views. The researcher's epistemological position aligns with the chosen methodology. It reflects the importance of human meaning making, but in a

97

social context, influenced by each participant's social interactions and cultural engagement. It can therefore be described as a form of social constructivism. Epistemological issues relating to the study will be explored further and reflected upon in the critical appraisal section of the thesis (chapter four).

The attempt to hear the views of LACYP on the key protective factors that promote their school engagement acknowledges that participants are knowledgeable about their realities and able to express that knowledge effectively (Bergold & Thomas, 2012). Furthermore, the researcher recognises the co-creation of meaning with participants through the analysis of data.

3.2.2 Participants

The guidelines for a desirable number of participants when using Thematic Analysis vary greatly. Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest between six to ten participants for a small project using interviews. Guest et al. (2006) suggest a similar number of participants when using qualitative interviews (six to twelve participants). However, justification for these numbers is rarely provided (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Fugard and Potts (2015) suggest that the implicit rationale for proposed numbers often rests on a balance between having enough data to demonstrate patterns/themes, but not so much data that the researcher is overwhelmed.

The current study has a small sample size of eight children. The social constructivist epistemology of the study promotes the value of each and every voice of the LACYP interviewed, without requiring a critical threshold of participant numbers to lend weight to the findings.

The eight pupils interviewed were from one local authority and interviews lasted between fifty and sixty-five minutes. Participants ranged in age from nine to twelve years, as they were drawn from Years 5 to 7, spanning both key stage two and early key stage three phases of education. The participants comprised three males and five females. All children were on pupil roll at mainstream schools. All participants lived in a long-term foster placement. In order to protect the identity of this special population, no personal identifiers or special category data was collected. The only data gathered about the children was their type of placement, year group and gender.

Interviews were conducted over terms five and six in 2021. All children returned to school at the beginning of March 2021 (term four), after the second prolonged national lockdown. However, due to LACYP's designation as 'vulnerable children', each of the LACYP interviewed had been regularly attending school in the six months prior to the national return to school. However, attendance would have been in small groups and therefore a different experience to traditional schooling (between December 2020 and early March 2020).

Please see table 9 for a breakdown of participants.

Table 9

Participant gender and year group

Participant Number	Gender	Year Group
Pilot	Female	Year 5
Child 1	Female	Year 5
Child 2	Female	Year 5
Child 3	Male	Year 6
Child 4	Male	Year 7
Child 5	Female	Year 7
Child 6	Male	Year 6
Child 7	Female	Year 7

Child 8	Female	Year 5

3.2.3 Procedures

Ethical approval for this study was gained from the UCL Research Ethics Committee (REC) – (appendix 7). A data protection form was registered with the UCL Data Protection Officer and a risk management form was also completed.

3.2.4 Recruitment and Pilot Study

The researcher is an educational psychologist (EP) with experience working with the local Virtual School (VS) team. Due to the potentially vulnerable population, the VS senior management team were approached to suggest potential participants, rather than contacting LACYP known to the researcher. The choice not to work with schools with an existing relationship to the researcher was hoped to reduce potential pressure to participate in the research. The VS were asked to identify potential participants of the appropriate age who were not at a vulnerable stage in their lives e.g. subject to court proceedings or a change of placement. A manager made the suggestion that participants be drawn from the local LACYP pupil voice forum. However, the researcher requested a range of pupils be put forward, to include the views of LACYP with fewer opportunities and less experience of sharing their perspectives.

Once potential participants were identified, the social worker and foster carer were contacted by the researcher and provided with information sheets (appendix 8) and a consent form for the social worker (appendix 9). If consent was provided, the designated teacher (DT) and head teacher of the relevant school were approached and provided with a letter detailing the project (appendix 10).

The researcher then liaised with the child's key adult (identified by the DT) about their role within the research and the importance of gaining informed consent. They were provided with the child information sheet (appendix 11), infographic for accessibility (appendix 12) and child consent form (appendix 13). The foster carer was also encouraged to discuss the research with the child in their care. Before the interview commenced, the researcher explained the process to the child in the presence of their key adult and they were encouraged to ask questions. The researcher checked written informed consent had been given. Written consent was emailed to the researcher.

The right to withdraw from the study was stated explicitly on all information sheets and consent forms. Participants were reminded of their right to withdraw at the beginning of each interview. It was made clear that there would be no negative consequences resulting from a decision to withdraw from the research.

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, interviews were conducted via Microsoft (MS) Teams, a remote secure platform. The interviews were recorded (with informed consent) and held securely on a laptop with two factor authentication in MS Stream (OneDrive), in an account only the data gatherer had access to. The transcript function on MS Teams was enabled to automatically generate a transcript for each interview. Interviews were deleted once transcripts were made available and checked for accuracy. Transcripts were anonymised and stored securely (see above). Any paper documentation e.g. drawings were emailed securely and saved in a password protected folder on the same laptop. These were stored with the transcripts. Transcripts and drawings will be destroyed (securely) in March 2023.

A pilot interview was conducted with a Year 5 female in order to check the clarity and accessibility of the questions and establish whether the content covered was potentially comfortable for participants. As a result of the pilot study, changes were made to the interview schedule relating to warm up questions and a change to one of the PCP tools (Ideal self), due to repetition and leading with an invitation for negative reflections on self. Participants were also offered an element of choice as to how they wanted to respond to the tools presented. Reflections from the pilot interview and the rationale for changes are explored in more depth in the critical appraisal (chapter four).

3.2.5 Ethical considerations for a vulnerable population – Beneficence

Special consideration was given to section 10 of the Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2014), 'Safeguards for working with vulnerable populations' when designing the study. LACYP are considered a vulnerable population on account of both their age and in-care status.

The interviews took place in a private room in the presence of the child's key adult (a member of staff they identified as safe and familiar). This was to help them feel more at ease and also enable them to tell their key adult if they wished to withdraw from the interview at any time (Taylor et al., 2014). Children were reminded that there were no right or wrong answers and were offered a break half-way through the interview.

The focus of the interviews was on protective factors, as opposed to risk factors and so children were not asked to share any distressing experiences e.g. relating to their personal history. The interview schedules were informed by PCP tools, including 'The Ideal School' (Moran, 2001) and use of Salmon lines (Salmon,

102

1988). The children were asked to engage in drawing activities e.g. their Ideal School to provide a creative outlet for thoughts and feelings, reduce the language burden and be less intense than direct questioning. However, they could choose to imagine their ideal school and verbalise their thoughts if preferred. Children were not expected to give the researcher a copy of their drawings, although they were invited to share an anonymous copy if they felt comfortable in doing so.

Although children were not asked about past events or difficult experiences, it was still possible for a participant to raise something that was potentially distressing to them. The researcher was prepared to ask the participant if they would like to stop the interview, should this happen. Children would also be encouraged to spend time with their key adult to provide emotional containment, with the researcher doing the same in the first instance. The key adult would be able to speak with the researcher in their capacity as EP for advice or signposting, if relevant.

Interviews were designed so that they ended with a positive focus, including an informal discussion about things the participant was looking forward to, to ensure that they left the interview in a positive emotional state. The participant was encouraged to ask questions and reminded of the purpose of the interview and what would happen with their data.

Prior to the interviews, the researcher ensured that they knew who the designated safeguarding lead(s) was. Should a child make a safeguarding disclosure, the researcher was prepared to follow the school's procedure for responding to safeguarding concerns (according to their safeguarding policy).

The day after each interview, Lundy's (2007) 'Children and Young People's Checklist' was sent to each participant via their Key Adult. This was in order to evaluate how well each child felt listened to, using Lundy's (2007) four elements of participation model. Feedback and reflections will be explored in the critical appraisal (chapter four).

Ethical considerations will also be reflected upon further in the critical appraisal of the thesis.

3.2.6 Measure: Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews using Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) approaches were conducted for all participants.

The study's interview questions and prompts were informed by research into methodological considerations when devising and conducting interviews with children. Ponizovsky-Bergelson et al. (2019) examined the relationship between interviewer categories and children's responses in their review. Categories that produced the richest data (after analysis) included the use of open-ended questions, expressions of encouragement and questions that express a request e.g. 'Can you tell me about the picture?' Conversely, response data suggested that closed-ended questions and sequences of questions yielded less rich data.

Analysis also indicated that adults should reassure children they want to learn about their views and that their views matter, which should be re-affirmed throughout the interview session. Dunphy and Farrell (2011) explain the importance of telling children at the beginning of the interview that there are no right or wrong answers, encouraging them to simply state their opinion. These considerations were reflected in the interview schedule (appendix 14).

Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) are clear that that the hallmark of true participatory research with children is not the use of specific methods but the 'co-production of knowledge' via the reciprocal relationship between researcher and participant. This was the guiding principle for the researcher during interviews with the children and informed decisions to use warm-up questions, offer a choice of how to complete activities and flexible question order.

In Holland's (2009) review of theoretical and methodological approaches to understanding looked after children's perspectives, she concurs with Winter's (2006) view that there is a lack of credibility given to younger LACYP's ability to express their views and a lack of creativity in research designs that might achieve this. Furthermore, "some research designs allowed very little leeway for young people's individual constructs of their experiences to emerge" (p.230). This provided the rationale for the use of personal construct psychology as a robust way of eliciting children's views via their personally defined constructs.

3.2.7 PCP approaches including use of drawings to elicit the voice of the child

Personal construct psychology (PCP) is a naturalistic approach in which knowledge and meaning are viewed as active and co-constructed processes, with a belief that everyone behaves in a way that makes sense to them (Williams & Hanke, 2007).

In their research with CYP using PCP approaches, Burr et al. (2012) noted that participants found the methods engaging, flexible and intuitive. The use of PCP also helped to avoid responses based on social desirability bias and enabled CYP to articulate their personal constructs in a concrete way, via visual methods.

They also noted that participants appreciated taking on an active role, rather than simply answering questions.

Maxwell's (2006) research using PCP to elicit student voice, suggests the use of multiple methods to elicit the voice of CYP, including drawings, which can help to triangulate oral evidence and encourage children to feel relaxed.

According to Ravenette (1980), eliciting a construct and its opposite promotes a 'polarity of thinking', which illuminates a child's personal constructs when the researcher explores what each conception represents and denies. This is developed further by the use of both root and exploratory questions. Examples include 'laddering' to explore the core values held by participants and 'pyramiding,' to clarify more abstract concepts by describing associated behaviours (Kelly, 1955; Beaver, 1996). PCP techniques can helpfully be conceived as 'a way to understand children's understanding' (Ravenette, 1997).

The semi-structured interviews therefore used adapted versions of the Salmon line (Salmon, 1988) and Ideal School technique (Williams & Hanke, 2007), based on PCP, to gather the views of LACYP regarding key protective factors that promote school engagement at the individual, family and school levels (see interview schedule - appendix 14).

3.2.8 Salmon lines

The purpose of the Salmon line is to ascertain how a child views themselves in relation to self-identified bi-polar constructs and explore 'possibilities for change' (Beaver, 1996). Ravenette's (1980) root question asks the child/young person to think of an 'other imagined child' and then express three things about them. LACYP in this study were asked to imagine someone who likes coming to school

(real or imagined) and then asked three things about them (not relating to appearance). Asking for three things suggests to the child that there is no singular objective answer (Ravenette, 1980). Although the root question is devised by the researcher, the ensuing constructs are owned by the child.

Each LACYP was then asked to plot each construct and its opposite on a visual scale, shared on the Teams screen. Rather than plotting a variety of significant others, LACYP were asked to plot themselves in relation to their chosen bi-polar constructs, in different contexts e.g. a favourite/least favourite lesson, lunchtime etc. Participants were then asked questions to identify what staff, carers and they themselves could do to move towards the preferred construct, exploring possibilities for change. Techniques including laddering and pyramiding were used sensitively to probe deeper into personal constructs. An example of the former was: 'What does (x quality/behaviour) look like?' An example of the latter was: 'What makes (the preferred pole) important for wanting to come to school?' Please see figure 1 for an example of bi-polar constructs completed by a participant (the first of the three constructs is presented in bold).

Figure 1

Salmon line activity example

0	1	2	3	**4**	5	6	**7**	8	9	10

1) **Not interested in their work** 2) Doesn't do what the teacher tells them 3) Boring	Maths and Science English		1) **Interested in their work** 2) Does what the teacher tells them 3) Fun
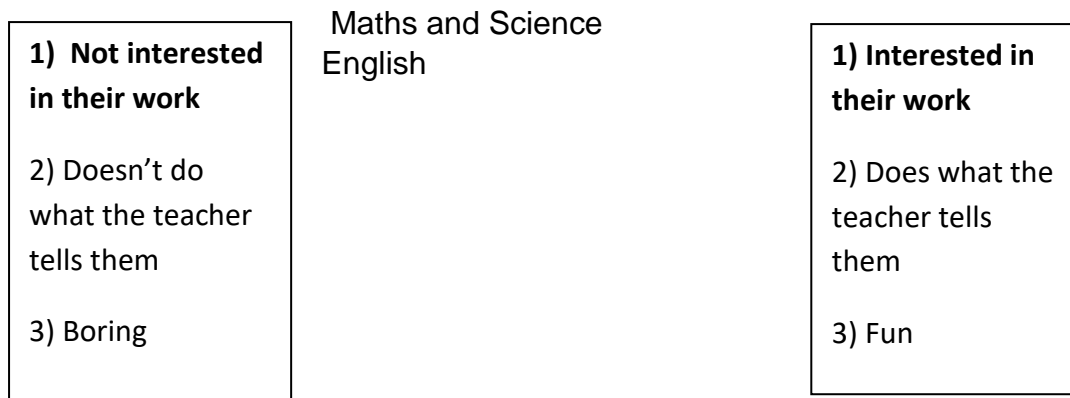
3.2.9 Ideal School (Williams & Hanke, 2007)

This drawing technique based on PCP, is an adapted version of the 'Ideal Self' technique devised by Moran (2001), first used with autistic children and young people. Williams and Hanke (2007) operated on the basis that if time is taken to elicit what is important to a child in the school setting, they are more likely to engage in their educational environment.

In this drawing activity, children were invited to sketch what they perceive to be optimal educational conditions in terms of environment, resources, staff and peer attributes, but without pre-empting what their views and preferences might be.

See appendix 14 for a copy of the interview schedule and the use of questions from the Ideal School technique. Questions relating to school engagement were added such as: 'In your ideal school, what would make you want to come in and not miss any days?' Please see figure 2 for an example of an Ideal School drawing completed by a participant. Labels in blue were voiced by the child and recorded by the researcher.

Figure 2

Ideal School Drawing Example from a Year 6 participant
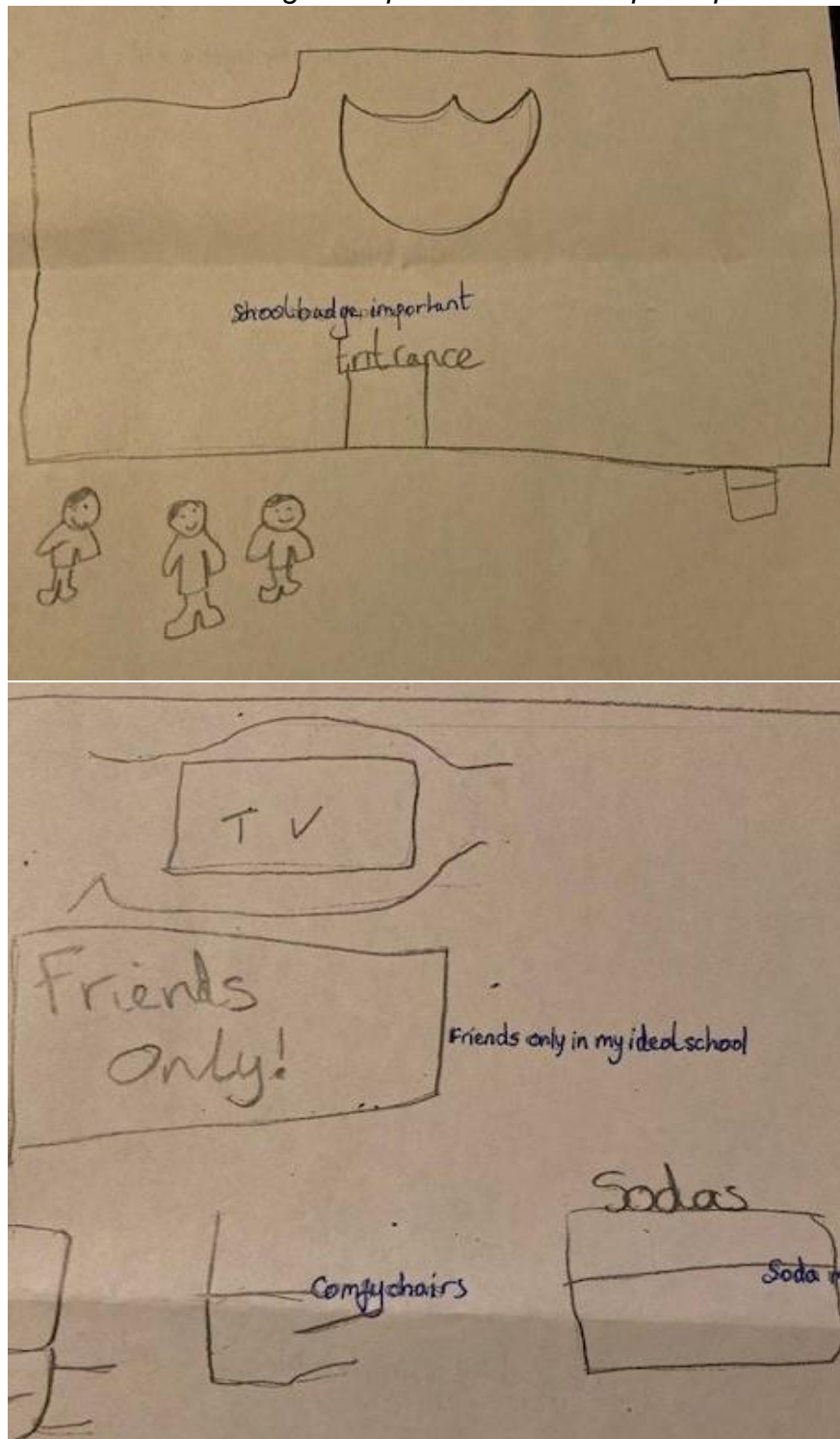
3.2.10 Method of Qualitative Analysis: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The PCP methods chosen required a qualitative method of analysis that could

identify patterns from children's self-reported personal constructs regarding

school. Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) is a process that can make sense of views and perceptions by going beyond analysis to interpretation. Research is collaborative, as participants are regarded as co-researchers. The flexibility of Reflexive Thematic Analysis enabled analysis within a framework of PCP techniques, whilst facilitating the identification of new data. In this research, a hybrid inductive (data driven) and deductive approach was therefore taken. The former is consistent with the epistemology of the study and the importance of hearing the voice of each child, with an openness to new views and ideas. The deductive element relates to the use of pre-existing research questions, PCP tools to structure the interviews and pre-engagement with the relevant literature in the field.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis can be viewed as a 'foundational method' for qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). It is also flexible in that it can be used across a range of theoretical approaches and is compatible with constructionist and constructivist epistemologies, reflected in this study. Braun and Clarke (2019) acknowledge the importance of each researcher identifying their theoretical position and the assumptions brought to the analysis, as "data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum" (Braun & Clarke, 2006 p.12). Epistemology and alternative data analysis approaches will be explored in depth in the critical appraisal chapter of the thesis (part four).

Researcher reflexivity will also be discussed in the critical appraisal chapter, aided by the use of a research journal throughout the data collection and analysis phases. The journal included a diary reflecting on issues that arose from each interview, the process, levels of engagement and rapport between researcher and participant.

Within Reflexive Thematic Analysis, themes are not viewed as passively 'emerging' from the data. To 'give voice' subscribes to a naïve realist view (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The researcher is active within the process, which is recursive rather than linear i.e. moving back and forth within data items and between the data set, refining codes and themes throughout. Themes are therefore identified as actively 'generated'. They can evolve as boundaries are shifted. For example, codes can be 'collapsed' with other codes and 'promoted' to themes (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

In this research, the dataset consisted of interview responses, which included Ideal School drawings and responses from the Salmon line activity. These were analysed as part of the interview dataset, rather than separately.

See table 10 for a summary of the different phases of the Thematic Analysis process:

Table 10

Summary table of the six phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019)

Phase number and title	Description
1. Familiarising yourself with the data	Transcribe interview data, immerse oneself in the data by reading and re-reading. Note down initial thoughts.
2. Generating initial codes	Work systematically to identify codes across the data set, by looking at interesting features of the data.
3. Searching for themes	Look for patterns of meaning throughout the data set, gather and categorise codes into potential themes.
4. Reviewing themes	Two levels: 1. Do the themes reflect the coded extracts? 2. Do the themes work across the entire data set? Start to formulate a thematic map
5. Defining and naming themes	Continue analysis by refining themes further, ensuring each theme has a clear

111

	definition and label. Is there a clear narrative throughout the analysis?
6. Producing the report	Select rich illustrative quotations from the coded extracts. Locate the analysis in the context of relevant literature and the research question(s). Finally, produce a report of the findings and their implications.

Using the guidance detailed in table 10, the six phases will be discussed in the context of this research, providing an audit trail to promote transparency and replicability. See appendix 15 for an example of a coded transcript to illustrate the coding process.

Phase and Description of the process

1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:

The study generated eight transcripts and associated drawings. The researcher engaged in a rigorous process of transcription, checking the automatically generated transcripts against the MS Teams recording of each interview, for sense and accuracy. This enabled a verbatim transcription of verbal data. The researcher then took part in an active immersion of the data by re-reading all transcripts and recording initial ideas.

2. Generating initial codes:

Each transcript was coded by identifying the basic element of information presented. The researcher attempted to use the participant's own words to formulate each code, rather than summarising or interpreting at this stage, consistent with the research aim. Multiple codes were used without any limitation on number, including codes that represented differing views or contradictory data

e.g. relating to birth siblings. All transcripts were given equal weighting when moving systematically across the data set.

3. Searching for themes:

Codes were then gathered and organised into potential themes, including relevant coded data extracts, which served as illustrative quotations. Visual and manual methods were employed to organise codes into clusters, including use of post-it notes to form 'theme-piles.' Mind maps were used as a visual summary tool. A temporary miscellaneous pile was formed for those codes that did not seem to fit into a particular theme. The search for themes across the data set was a recursive and iterative process and although noted, prevalence was not a determining factor for identifying themes (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Joffe, 2012). This led to the organisation of potential descriptive themes and overarching abstract themes.

4. Reviewing themes:

The researcher then reviewed the themes by cross-referencing them with the codes identified and the entire data set. Patton's (1991) dual criteria for a theme was applied: Internal homogeneity - checking the data within each theme corresponded in a meaningful way and external heterogeneity – checking that each theme was distinct from all others. In the first instance this was completed by the researcher alone.

Peer debriefing (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997) was then employed as a method to promote the credibility and trustworthiness of findings. Two EPs experienced in the use of qualitative analysis were invited to review all codes and themes and to challenge the classification system used by the researcher.

113

Emphasis was given to Patton's (1991) dual criteria for a theme, discussing how well codes 'hung together' to create a theme and how distinct each theme was. The two peers also challenged the researcher to reflect on axiology, identifying the fundamental values held by the researcher and whether the codes and themes were consistent with such values e.g. checking whether the classification of certain codes reflected the voice of LACYP by re-looking at coded extracts. Modifications were made as a result of the peer debriefing process. A form of member checking would have been more consistent with the researcher's axiology, by checking interpretations with the LACYP interviewed, promoting dependability (Elliot & Timulak, 2005). However, time constraints and other pragmatic considerations meant this was not possible. The researcher sought to clarify participants' responses within the interview process itself.

5. Defining and naming

The peer debriefing process enabled themes and theme names to be refined further, ensuring they captured the 'essence' of the codes they represented. The analysis of themes was then represented using a thematic map (appendix 16). This was formulated in a non-hierarchical way, to reflect that no theme had primacy over another.

6. Producing the report:

Data extracts were selected carefully to illuminate themes in the form of illustrative quotations. Extracts were selected that captured the 'essence' of a theme and added to the richness of findings. After a comprehensive presentation of findings, each theme was interpreted and analysed in the context of the

research questions and literature review, to form a golden thread throughout the research. Implications of the findings were also considered.

3.3 Findings

Reflexive Thematic analysis yielded four overarching abstract themes, each containing three descriptive themes, amounting to a total of twelve descriptive themes. See appendix 15 for an example of a coded transcript from which themes were derived. See the thematic map in figure 3 for an overview of the themes identified and how they are configured.

Themes were derived from an inductive analysis of the interview data, to stay as close as possible to the language used by the LACYP interviewed (whilst acknowledging a deductive element to the analysis). See appendix 17 for a list of codes from the entire data set and their abstraction to descriptive themes and finally abstract themes.

Explicit links to the research questions via a protective factors framework (at the three ecological levels), will be explored in the discussion section. The twelve descriptive themes identified in this study are interpreted as protective factors.

3.3.1 Thematic Map

Figure 3

Final Thematic Map
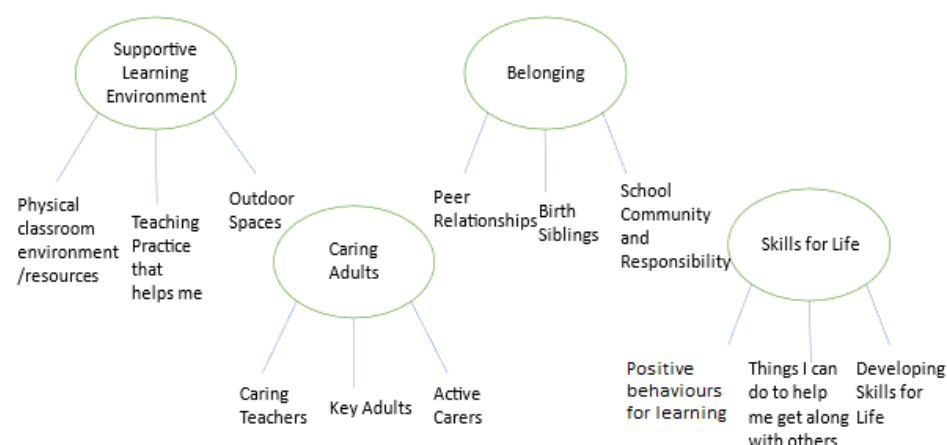
The first overarching abstract theme – A Supportive Learning Environment - is formed of three descriptive themes: 'Physical classroom environment and resources', 'Teaching practice that helps me' and 'Outdoor spaces':

3.3.2 Theme 1: A Supportive Learning Environment

<u>Physical classroom environment and resources</u>

Participants referred to physical aspects of the classroom that maximise their engagement. Three pupils spoke of the importance of a 'quiet' and 'calm' learning environment, helping them to concentrate. Allied to this was the desire for fewer pupils in the class:

> *"I think it (ideal classroom) would be a bit smaller than now, like twenty people in the class. And, uh, like really colourful."* (participant 7).

The same participant spoke of the need for a visual timetable, so she knew what to expect and also a traffic light system that reflects mood. She took this one step further by explaining that if her peers could see how she felt, they would be more likely to modify their responses to her. Another pupil spoke of his ideal classroom having lots of windows, so he could always check what was going on outside and alert teachers if something 'wasn't good.'

Access to technology was a common theme, with pupils emphasising different aspects, such as how fun it can be and how it can help them remember information.

Teaching Practice that helps me

In terms of processes, use of rewards was mentioned consistently. Different forms were mentioned such as positive behaviour logs, class rewards, merits and house points. Pupils spoke of the importance of their efforts being recognised and rewarded accordingly, like cause and effect. This was related to a desire to see progress:

> *"I like moving on and using my green pen or orange pen to show how well I'm doing…"* (participant 2).

Some participants spoke of access to a continuum of help in the classroom. One child mentioned that the teaching assistant often helps him, but added:

> *"I probably would like them to come and help me if I'm really stuck, but if I'm not too stuck, probably just ask the person I'm sitting next to."* (participant 3).

No child expressed a preference for continuous adult support, although participants spoke of appreciating help when 'stuck' and an adult 'checking in' on them. Support was still viewed as a priority.

A frequent response was the wish for lessons to be fun and 'less boring.' This was conceived in a variety of ways, ranging from a mixture of work and play to

helping pupils learn through their interests e.g. sport, and even swapping skill sets with other pupils, to encourage a broader ownership of learning.

The majority of participants spoke of a preference for 'learning by doing', with the provision of lots of examples and plenty of practice to build confidence. Pupils wanted to be shown what to do, rather than simply told:

> *"They show you how to do it and then they give you the same question with the same working out, just with different numbers and you get used to it."* (participant 2).

Half of the participants explained that they had difficulties remembering information, especially due to 'lockdown.' They raised possibilities for how some of the effects might be mitigated by teachers. These included being allowed books in tests, being permitted to use phones in the classroom and being told what they will cover in the next lesson, so they can prepare.

Writing was identified as a trouble spot by two particular pupils. They suggested that an adult could start the writing off for them or 'check and guide' them. Another pupil spoke of the need to engage in creative writing, in which she could enjoy 'making things up.'

Outdoor Spaces

Over half of pupils spoke of the need for outdoor play or activities, including access to play equipment. Allied to this was the idea of sport being very enjoyable, especially team sports. Other pupils placed a different emphasis on outside spaces, explaining the need for a designated area to eat lunch and a 'calm zone.'

One pupil spoke of his love of school trips. When asked to elaborate he responded:

> *"Probably 'cause you're out interacting… and you get to look at stuff and it's a bit easier to concentrate than being in the classroom… Like you don't have to sit there for an hour where you just like listen and then do* work*. You can actually interact with different things."* (participant 4).

3.3.3 Theme 2: Caring adults

This analytic theme comprises three descriptive themes: 'Caring teachers', 'Key adults' and 'Active carers':

<u>Caring Teachers</u>

This theme explores key qualities and actions identified by the participants, relating to their own experience of teachers and their ideal teacher (even though they were not asked to describe their ideal teacher explicitly).

Children described the need for teachers to be 'kind'. This was operationalised as someone who is not too strict and doesn't shout a lot. Children also liked the idea of being taken to one side when the teacher needed to reprimand them or explain a complex idea. Central to this was the importance of the teacher being able to empathise with their pupils and treat each person equally:

> *"…like they don't have favourite people and they don't have favourites and they understand if you don't understand the work 'cause they've probably gone through it before, like when they were at school…"* (participant 7).

Another key aspect of the teacher's role described by participants was the need to provide comfort when worried or upset.

Most participants spoke of the importance of the teacher helping them when they needed it, taking time to explain lesson content and answer their questions, without 'being afraid to ask.' One participant explained that a teacher should know 'your strengths and difficulties,' so they can target help. Others spoke of the importance of praise and encouragement whilst helping, creating a virtuous cycle:

119

> *"(They) boost your confidence when you're really stuck on something. They will help you and then you feel confidence 'cause you know like I learned tips, I'm really confident I can do it next time and then usually they give you a different question and then you can answer it and then you can feel even more confident."* (participant 5).

Participants also identified a key role of the teacher as someone who could maintain boundaries, by for example 'settling the class down' and ensuring quiet when needed.

One participant reflected that it was her teachers who had helped her appreciate just how important her time at Primary School was.

Key Adults

Half of the participants spoke of a special relationship with a designated key adult at school, other than a teacher. They spoke of feeling close to their key adult and the importance of having time to talk with them regularly about "*all that's been going on.*" The key adult was viewed as someone who could provide consistent emotional support. For some, this was in the context of a nurture approach, defined by a nurture space and activities:

> *"Mrs E. is the best thing about the nurture room."* (participant 1).

> *"I play with feathers, I touch them of course. I play hairdressers with a doll and Mrs E."* (participant 1).

One participant spoke of the vital role her key adult plays in increasing her understanding and ensuring her voice is heard in meetings:

> *"Whenever we have meetings, she can help us with stuff like when I talk about things I do and don't like about school, she helps me understand stuff… in PEP meetings she says what I want."* (participant 2).

Active Carers

Participants spoke of both academic and emotional support from carers. Almost all of the participants spoke of the importance of carers helping them with school-

work, whether homework, pre-teaching, consolidating understanding or giving extra work to prepare for secondary school:

> *"…they are quite good with work, so obviously every night they test you and go and check your homework. So it's kind of like a routine we do so obviously we wouldn't miss homework and we can bring it in on time and if we're stuck on anything they would help us."* (participant 5).

Most participants acknowledged the role their carers have in signposting them to help when they are unsure themselves. They also appreciated that their carers provide them with routine and keep them organised. One participant spoke affectionately about his carers' teaching strategies and taking an interest in his skill development (non-academic):

> *"…I kept landing on my knees so my dad said learn about handspring first 'cause it will help you get stronger…"* (participant 3).

> *"What I have to do is use a strategy that would help me remember these steps (Rubik's cube). So I was taught what to do by my dad."* (participant 3).

Half of the participants spoke spontaneously about the close emotional bond they have with their carers and described them as 'supportive' and 'patient.' Being treated equally was prized highly by one participant:

> *"We always have the same amount of, so that we get equally shared out like the same amount. We all have the same amount of space in our bedrooms and we have the same amount of pens and pencils."* (participant 7).

For some participants, beloved pets and pursuing outdoor activities together was an extension of the experience of a caring family.

3.3.4 Theme 3: Belonging

This analytic theme comprises three descriptive themes: 'Peer relationships', 'Birth siblings' and 'School community and responsibility':

Peer relationships

All participants spoke of the importance of friendship for a positive experience of school and sense of belonging, even if not always straight-forward. Peers were

121

raised mainly in the context of emotional connection, but one pupil also acknowledged that peers can support understanding and help when stuck.

Participants explained that they wanted to choose who they could play and work with. They described friends as 'kind', 'supportive', 'good at sharing' and most of all, 'fun':

> *"Friends are like the main thing because they're always there so you can have a laugh and talk to them, chat like about the latest things. It's really fun."* (participant 5).

Some children raised the moral aspect of friendship, helping each other 'do the right thing' and 'protecting' each other. A commonly supported idea was that friends are a constant in one's life and not just a fleeting presence:

> *"A friend is not just the kid that wouldn't talk to you much, your friends talk to you everyday… also, your friends won't be mean to you as other kids probably will."* (participant 3).

Some children expressed difficult feelings around peer relationships. These included finding talking to others 'hard', feeling lost and confused with some peers and nervous around unfamiliar peers. One participant described his ideal school as one where only his established friends could attend. Fear of bullying or being friendless was also expressed, with the suggestion of a 'buddy bus stop' to help. What became evident over the course of the interviews was that although positive friendships are emotionally powerful, the corollary is also true:

> *"If they say like, I don't want to be your friend anymore, you start to feel really left out and sad that they don't want to play with you anymore."* (participant 2).

Participants were clear that being with peers and teachers for a long period of time enhances their sense of belonging.

<u>Birth siblings</u>

Although the participants were not asked questions relating to birth family, most children spoke of members of their birth family, most notably siblings. This theme captures a lot of conflicting feelings, not just across participants, but within them. Some children spoke of a desire to attend a school either close to or with their siblings. One child spoke of the benefit of her older sibling giving her advice, as he had attended the school for longer and could tell her about the expectations of different teachers. However, three of the participants also shared ambivalent feelings about attending the same school as their birth siblings. One spoke about his brother's exclusion and another about the difficulties of her brother not sharing. One participant reflected:

> *"…we can really not get along and we can say really unkind and unrelevant things to each other but when I'm at school, I'm not with him and can just be my normal self."* (participant 5).

For the children whose siblings lived separately, it was clear that they still held them in mind. For the purposes of the Protective Factors Framework, the theme 'Birth siblings' has been re-framed as 'Sensitivity to feelings about birth siblings.'

<u>School Community and Responsibility</u>

Three children spoke in depth about certain physical markers promoting their role in the school and therefore enhancing their sense of belonging and responsibility. These included a coloured fleece (signifying deputy head boy), a badge and the school house system. The latter has a collective significance because it "makes my house happy." One participant also reflected on the joys of being picked for the school district team.

Allied to having a clear role was a deep sense of pride and responsibility for some:

> *"When I became deputy head boy I guess 'cause it made me feel more proud of what student I am and how I guess it changed my mood that I was, 'cause in Year 5 I used to be really bad… 'cause I got really annoyed with what the teacher said… but now I'm alright and I feel much better and more behaved and I was lucky that I became the deputy head boy considering what I'd done in Year 5."* (participant 3).

The same participant went on to reflect that his new role made him feel like he had greater responsibility "in what other kids are doing" and it signified that the teacher trusted him.

Other participants viewed being given a voice and choice at school as key to a sense of responsibility:

> *"…teachers have asked us what we could add to the playground to make it more fun… so we have community time. We said we like just thinking about what can you add that could be new and we have a vote too."* (participant 5).

Two participants spoke of a preference for being asked what they want to learn and pupils reaching a consensus. One pupil suggested a creative mechanism for this:

> *"Get the kids in charge of the lesson and teaching the teachers… so then the teachers know a bit more about you and what you like doing, and then they can get that in their head… and then they know what to do during their next lesson to make it fun."* (participant 7).

3.3.5 Theme 4: Skills for Life

The final analytic theme also comprises three descriptive themes: 'Positive behaviours for learning', 'Pro-social behaviours' and 'Developing skills through clubs'.

Positive behaviours for learning:

When asked to reflect on their own actions during the salmon line activity, half of the participants referred to a meta-cognitive aspect of learning. This included strategies to remember things, re-reading work, pre-thinking and checking work through. One participant provided a glimpse into his thinking processes during a writing task:

> *"…so if there's like this piece of paper with stuff that I need to write about … I could just read the thing, his example and then what I'd do is read it twice then skim read it then what I'd do is copy it, magpie it a little bit and then combine it with some of my own sentence and put it in… until something clicks in my head."* (participant 3).

Participants spoke of the importance of a good attitude to learning, wanting to learn and the need to persist. Concentration was also emphasised, especially when one doesn't enjoy the subject.

> *"But in class 'cause you've got to really concentrate because it can lead up to your career, so to concentrate on what you need to do and it helps you with tests."* (participant 5).

Another participant reflected on the importance of focusing on what she needs, in order to learn:

> *"…when I just wanna get on with something and then whoever (is) sat next to me will be asking me questions and I really want to concentrate on the lesson 'cause I struggle with some, so I kind of just decide to leave them to it and do what I need to. I ask them to go over and ask the teacher for help."* (participant 5).

Children also mentioned the importance of starting off with foundation skills and building on these 'step by step', with practice at home to ensure consolidation. Other practical approaches included the need to read more often, read for enjoyment, revise and get homework done '*so it's out of the way*.' Two children reflected on the importance of using their own interests to learn more and '*be in charge'* of their learning.

Other participants focused on the importance of utilising others to optimise learning e.g. knowing when to ask for help from teachers or family, the importance of accepting guidance and asking questions.

Pro-social behaviours

Participants reflected on the importance of caring for others and being respectful e.g. letting people go first, and doing what they are told. Such behaviours were described across all contexts i.e. with staff, family and peers. During the salmon line activity, when asked what qualities might help someone to enjoy coming to school, one participant expressed the following:

> *"Probably nice caring, thoughtful. So then they could think of what the teachers could be going through and if they've had a really bad day or something they can like try and be nice to them and caring to them so then they wouldn't think 'oh not this class again' 'cause they really annoyed me yesterday.'"* (participant 5).

The same participant was able to reflect that engaging in such pro-social behaviour can make them feel happier and therefore more eager to attend school:

> *"Yeah and they could…think of what they've done and think 'Oh yeah, I've done that today, that really made me happy' and all that. Then they'll go home and think 'tomorrow I'll be even more nicer and be more happier.'"* (participant 5).

Some children focused on more reflective behaviours such as the importance of being themselves, the ability to say sorry when in the wrong and to stand back and '*think about what's going on*.' Another participant added that he would like it if things *'didn't bother him so much*.'

Developing skills through clubs

Most participants attended at least one extracurricular club and spoke about their clubs with enthusiasm. Scouts and guides were most frequently cited with reflections on the broader skills promoted within many of the activities:

126

> *"…lots of things that I do at Scouts helps me inside of school as well. Well because there they learn you different like things for life and different kinds of skills to prepare you to be an adult."* (participant 4).

Other clubs mentioned included athletics, dancing, farming club and drama therapy. In the former, the participant spoke about the sheer joy of showing off how good he is. Farming club provided opportunities for channelling a love for animals and dancing was seen as a forum for expressing oneself and feeling free. One participant reflected on the benefits of attending drama therapy:

> *"In the drama therapy people can be in the same situation, so then you can talk about it and then they can give advice to help."* (participant 5).

More generally, participants explained that clubs are fun, help build their confidence and enable them to make new friends. One child reflected that this could have a positive impact on peer relationships at school:

> *"I think at guides I like it because you can do all kinds of things and you make friends there living around your area … and I think at school I think clubs to go to is really good 'cause you can make a bit more friends and like at school you've got like different people to hang around with."* (participant 7).

3.4 Discussion

The following section will discuss findings in relation to relevant literature (explored in chapter one – the literature review) and implications for education professionals. The section will start with an overview of the protective factors identified by the LACYP interviewed and how these were derived.

3.4.1 Overview of Protective Factors

Table 11 illustrates the key protective factors that promote school engagement, as identified by the LACYP interviewed. These are based on the descriptive themes identified by Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Factors are divided into those at the individual, family and school/community level, consistent with the three research questions posed and the social

127

ecological view of resilience (Rutter, 2012). Although divided into three levels, there is an acknowledgement that protective factors are fluid, interactive and often reciprocal in nature. Some protective factors span more than one level e.g. 'Developing skills through clubs' is present at the individual as well as school/community level. The following framework is therefore fluid and what the researcher considers a 'best fit.'

Table 11

Protective Factors at the three ecological levels

Protective Factors – Individual level	Protective Factors – Family level	Protective Factors- School/Community level
Positive behaviours for learning	Active Carers	Physical classroom environment and resources
Pro-social behaviours	Sensitivity to feelings about Birth Siblings	Teaching Practice that helps me
		Outdoor Spaces
		Key Adults
		Peer Relationships
		School Community and Responsibility
		Developing skills through clubs

The themes identified are not intended as a list of stable factors, but rather a snapshot of protective factors identified by a specific sample of children at a particular stage in their lives and are therefore contextually bound (Luthar et al., 2006). However, there is significant cross-over between the protective factors identified by the eight participants and those highlighted in the thematic synthesis

explored in the literature review (chapter two). The results of this qualitative study are therefore presented in this context, to strengthen dependability.

The interviews do not provide an exhaustive list, but rather present a glimpse into the views of a small group of LACYP. While the concept of generalisability found in quantitative research is not relevant here, it is hoped that the findings presented in the empirical paper, alongside those of the thematic synthesis, can be transferred in some part from this specific population to a similar specific population of LACYP (Schreier, 2017). However, the small sample size of eight children is acknowledged.

Processes to promote the dependability and confirmability of the study and limitations (including methodological weaknesses), will be explored in depth in the critical appraisal chapter.

The following discussion presents the salient findings from the reflexive thematic analysis, places them in the context of related research and explores possible implications. Specific implications of the findings from the three research questions for educational psychology practice will be explored in the critical appraisal. Each protective factor (descriptive theme) is explored under its corresponding ecological level i.e. individual, family or school/community, consistent with table 11 and the purpose of the study. This is to enable a fluid and in-depth exploration of themes within the context of the research questions posed. Perhaps unsurprisingly, most of the protective factors identified as promoting school engagement fall within the school/community ecological level of resilience. However, the quantity of themes within a level does not necessarily equate to impact and therefore significance. Furthermore, the emphasis on

protective factors at the school level is likely to reflect the weight of questioning and activities that focused on school within the interview schedule e.g. the Ideal School activity.

3.4.2 Research question one: Protective factors at the individual level

Positive behaviours for learning

During the Salmon lines activity, LACYP were asked to reflect on protective factors to promote a child's school engagement at a personal level. Many made reference to metacognitive strategies such as pre-thinking and checking work through. Such strategies promote cognitive school engagement, which includes self-regulation and strategic thinking. Self-regulation can be a challenge for some LACYP who have lacked opportunities to internalise regulation strategies from primary caregivers. One implication is the need to teach metacognitive approaches explicitly and from a young age, so they become 'second nature.' Such strategies also need to be embedded within the subject matter rather than decontextualised, to promote generalisation (Zimmerman, 2010). Additionally, teachers need to model planning, monitoring and evaluation, in order to promote the acquisition of metacognitive strategies (Mason, 2013). This can be achieved by teachers verbalising their thinking processes and asking appropriate questions to elicit such thinking e.g. 'Where have I seen something like this before?' 'What helped me?' etc.

Participants' reflections on the importance of a positive attitude to learning echoes the emphasis on the level of effort required for cognitive engagement (Fredericks et al., 2004). This is endorsed in the Neal (2017) study, which highlights determination and perseverance in the face of adversity as key

qualities that underpin school engagement and success for LACYP. An

emphasis on persistence is reflected in the growth mindset literature (Dweck,

2006), in which positive results are linked to effort as well as innate ability.

Participants also identified reading for enjoyment and more regularly as key to

learning, echoed in the literature review. Reading early and fluently was

identified as a key protective factor by participants in the Martin and Jackson

(2002) study. After all, reading is key to accessing the curriculum, as it develops

vocabulary and comprehension skills. An important implication is the need to

support reading at an early stage. A relational approach such as Paired Reading

could promote both literacy and attachment with carers, by following the child's

lead.

The desire to be in charge of aspects of one's learning by some participants

reflects the importance of choice, mastery and control, in order to promote

emotional engagement/motivation (Hass et al., 2014). Higher levels of motivation

are strongly correlated with higher levels of behavioural engagement, including

punctuality and attendance (Stipek, 2002).

The central importance of autonomy for intrinsic motivation and deep

engagement is further highlighted in self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci,

2000). Although a normative process for adolescents, Stein (2006) suggests that

the need for autonomy is amplified for LACYP. The desire for autonomy is

expressed by younger LACYP too, as reflected in the second of Sugden's (2013)

super-ordinate themes: 'School is a place where I can make choices.' Schools

and carers therefore need to reflect on opportunities for LACYP to take positive

control and experience a sense of agency from an early age. This can be

achieved by use of formal and informal structures that go beyond school councils. For example, vehicles to enable all children to express preferences for school equipment/processes (as described by one participant) and prolonged opportunities for LACYP to engage in child-initiated play. Provision of choice may even offset the need for some LACYP to establish control over aspects of their learning environment, in order to feel safe.

Pro-social behaviours

This theme reflected a strong link between pro-social behaviours such as caring for others (peers, staff and family) and feeling more positive about attending school (emotional engagement). This was described in the form of a virtuous cycle by one participant i.e. caring for others made her feel more positive and therefore more inclined to repeat the same behaviours.

Implications include the modelling of pro-social behaviours by staff and carers to promote an authentic culture of care and belonging. Explicit teaching of what pro-social behaviours look like may be necessary for some LACYP who have not had a consistent experience of care and kindness and therefore less opportunity to internalise and demonstrate such behaviours. This can be compounded if a young person carries an internal worldview that suggests adults cannot be trusted (Fonagy & Target, 1997). Positive reinforcement of pro-social behaviours (including a strong relational element) may be effective in perpetuating a virtuous cycle (Hepler, 1994). One pupil's reflections that such behaviours even motivate teachers to want to come in to school highlights the importance of whole school community and thus belonging and connection, which are so central to emotional engagement.

132

The two themes which represent protective factors at the individual level make a contribution to the resilience research for LACYP, as exploration of individual protective factors appears to be sparse in the literature. Emphasis often seems to be on what adults and peers can do to nurture protective factors for LACYP and less so on what LACYP identify as being within their control and agency. However, it is important to acknowledge that all three ecological levels interact with each other, demonstrated in the virtuous cycle of pro-social behaviours.

3.4.3 Research question two: Protective factors at the family level

<u>Active Carers</u>

The protective factor 'active carers' is also reflected in the analytic theme 'supportive adults' in the literature review. Support is expressed in both emotional and academic terms. Given that LACYP have experienced parental disruption and that parental involvement is more influential in determining success than poverty or school environment (HM Govt, 2005, in Lonne et al., 2008, p.49), active carers are highly significant in the lives of LACYP.

Both practical and emotional support are cited as important by participants, with provision of routine, structure and help with organisation, in addition to explicit support with homework. This resonates with the idea that resilience is 'ordinary magic', as familiar routines are interwoven into its fabric (Masten, 2001). Such external frameworks and practical support seem to provide implicit messages regarding the significance of education and also the expectations held of individual LACYP, which can be internalised and reflected back in levels of school engagement (Berridge, 2017: Clemens et al., 2017).

The importance of being 'treated equally' by carers reflects the central importance of being treated like 'one of the family.' This strong sense of belonging and experience of advocacy by carers can serve as a springboard for school engagement (Berridge, 2017: Dearden, 2004). Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) highlights the central importance of 'relatedness' for enhanced intrinsic motivation and depth of engagement.

The active involvement of carers can also translate into social capital, as LACYP are able to access support systems, social and academic environments that promote their school engagement (Hass et al., 2014). This demonstrates a close link between family and community systems when considering protective factors for LACYP. One obvious implication is the need for carers, community clubs/hubs and schools to work in partnership to optimise social capital and ensure consistently high expectations are conveyed to LACYP. Some carers will have lots of confidence in liaising with schools and acting as advocates, but others less so. Consideration therefore needs to be given to educational support systems for carers, to increase confidence and awareness of the broader impact of supporting education. Virtual school staff could be well placed to assist schools and carers by providing or informing such support systems.

Sensitivity to feelings about birth siblings

Most participants spoke spontaneously of members of their birth family, most notably siblings. A number expressed ambivalent feelings towards siblings in the school context, for example, appreciating their presence and guidance but also struggling with potential conflict or not feeling able to be themselves. Such conflicting feelings are reflected in the literature review, in which some

134

participants reported a need to move away from their birth family, but also make them proud (Berridge, 2017).

Clearly, a number of LACYP hold their birth family in mind and often have some form of contact, the effects of which should not be under-estimated in the school context. Contact can induce ambivalent and conflicting feelings (Boyle, 2015) and thus have an adverse impact on emotional school engagement. Equally, a desire to be close to birth siblings can act as a source of loss, impacting negatively on emotional wellbeing and engagement levels (Zabern & Bouteyre, 2017).

This presents a need for staff and carers to display awareness and sensitivity towards LACYP and the impact of their relationship with birth siblings, near or far. Listening to child voice and suspending assumptions is central to this endeavour. The need for LACYP to possess a coherent narrative of their family background and cultural roots is well documented (Winter & Cohen, 2005). Carers and school may have a significant role in promoting this narrative, so it is not just seen as the remit of the child's social worker.

3.4.4 Research question three: Protective factors at the school and community level

<u>Physical classroom environment and resources</u>

A desire for a smaller, quiet class and the use of visuals to help preparation e.g. a visual timetable, can be viewed as aids to establishing a more predictable learning environment. The additional use of visuals to reflect mood and prompt a positive reaction from peers, indicates a wish for a responsive as well as

135

predictable classroom setting. This appears to supersede pedagogy, embracing the emotional wellbeing of pupils.

Safety was also a consideration for some, reflected in a wish for an ideal classroom to have 'lots of windows' to check 'nothing bad' was going on. One possible interpretation of this wish is that it is an indication of hypervigilance, in which a child is more sensitised to possible dangers and more likely to attribute a hostile explanation to neutral stimuli. This is more likely for children who experience heightened anxiety, resulting from chronic stress or adversity, which is more prevalent in the LACYP population (Goodyer, 2018). This suggests the need for a learning environment that is mindful of the need for physical and emotional containment and safety, as they are intertwined. Thinking about a continuum of support, some LACYP may require a designated safe space (informed by their voice). This could be a place for the co-regulation of heightened emotions.

Teaching practice that helps me

The emphasis on recognition and rewards for effort, is consistent with the findings of the Martin and Jackson (2002) study, in which participants spoke of the importance of explicitly rewarding effort as well as attainment, in order to promote positive emotional engagement.

Access to a continuum of support rather than continuous help is reflected in one of the conclusions from Berridge's (2017) study: 'The right kind of help at the right time' and lends weight to the need to balance a predictable learning environment with a responsive one. Some LACYP have reported that targeted school-based interventions can unintentionally amplify a sense of difference and even stigma,

expressing a preference for universal programmes of support (Evans et al., 2016). Participants in the current study were clear that they required appropriate support to engage fully with learning. What form this takes will differ according to the individual child and so it makes sense that it is informed by them.

A responsive learning environment is allied to a strong preference for active learning, which is echoed in the literature review, in which participants emphasised the importance of lots of opportunities for practical learning grounded in the 'real world.' (Clemens et al., 2017; Tilbury et al. 2014). Learning by doing and a flexible curriculum are examples of the intersection between emotional and cognitive school engagement, as pupils increase in motivation by constructing meaning more actively. A sense of competence is likely to act as a mediating factor between active learning and high engagement levels (Ryan & Deci, 2000). References to practical learning opportunities were also associated with having fun, promoting emotional engagement.

Although aspects such as active learning, rewards for effort and a continuum of support appear to be common sense approaches, classroom lay-out and systems may not always be conducive to such approaches. These findings suggest that it could be worth schools examining how their structures support the reinforcement of effort on a daily basis and the evidence base for how best to provide a continuum of support for pupils e.g. use of peer tutoring strategies and appropriate deployment of teaching assistants to promote independent thinking (Radford et al., 2015).

<u>Outdoor spaces</u>

The love of school trips expressed by some participants seems to echo the preference for active learning opportunities. This is contrasted with difficulties 'sitting there' and listening for long periods. Concentrating whilst being still can be a challenge for many children for a myriad of reasons, including language difficulties, neurological difficulties e.g. Attention Deficit Disorder and sensory processing difficulties.   However, maintaining attention may be even more problematic for some LACYP, as it requires a higher degree of self-regulation skills, which can be a challenge when early attachments have been disrupted and the ability to regulate emotions has not been fully internalised (Fonagy & Target, 1997). This can be exacerbated by the impulse to engage in sensory seeking behaviours, if sensory systems have been impacted by early trauma (Fraser et al., 2017). Van der Kolk (2015) proposes that opportunities for movement help to process trauma due to the fundamental connection between mind and body and the effects of 'toxic stress' on the body.

The extra-curricular pursuit of outdoor activities e.g. sports in schools, has been cited as having a 'transformative effect' for LACYP (Gilligan, 2000) and linked to reduced exclusion and truancy rates for vulnerable children (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997). Outdoor spaces were also viewed as a valuable extension of the school building, fulfilling important functions for the LACYP interviewed e.g. social eating and a 'calm zone.' Schools could therefore consider how outdoor spaces and activities could be used as places of refuge, community and skill development, as well as places of leisure.

138

<u>Caring Teachers</u>

Participants described the need for teachers to be 'kind' and treat pupils equally, to develop trust. The setting of boundaries was also seen as central to the teacher's role. This is reflected in the findings of Hojer and Johansson (2013), that LACYP perceive the teacher role as extending far beyond a pedagogic one. Emotional support therefore promotes emotional engagement at school and thus behavioural engagement (Tilbury et al., 2014).

When asked about adults at school, children cited their teacher and the importance of the teacher role most frequently. The primacy of the teacher role is consistent with the findings of previous qualitative studies that found LACYP viewed their teacher as the main adult that supported educational progress (Harker et al., 2004) and as key to academic self-concept and wellbeing (Berridge, 2017).

Participants' emphasis on praise, encouragement and boundary setting is also consistent with findings from the literature review: LACYP value non-harsh but consistent behaviour management within a culture of positive reinforcement (Tilbury et al., 2014: Clemens at al., 2017).

The importance of the teacher role for LACYP is reflected in recommendation 41 of the NICE guidelines for looked-after children and young people (2015): The provision of teacher training to promote understanding of the impact of the adverse effects of loss and trauma on emotional wellbeing and mental health. This study suggests that attachment friendly approaches to teaching e.g. the use of emotional regulation strategies and promotion of consistency and nurture,

should also be included in teacher training, to equip teachers with tools to carry out their multi-faceted role.

School structures could also reflect the primacy of the relationship with the teacher for LACYP, suspending the assumption that a child's emotional needs will be met entirely by their key adult, enabling the teacher to focus on the 'business' of learning.

<u>Key Adults</u>

The consistent emotional support provided by key adults (non-teaching members of staff) was also prized highly. This fits with a compensatory model of resilience in which the benefits of emotionally attuned nonfamilial adults are likely to have added significance for children who have experienced 'broken family ties' (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1997). Dent and Cameron (2003) discuss the strong association between emotional warmth, consistency and positive educational outcomes. It seems that non-teaching members of staff are well placed to act as mentors or 'key adults', although the significance of the teacher for emotional engagement is still of paramount importance.

This raises some important points for consideration, such as the need for partnership working between key adults and teachers and the possibility of a more prominent role for key adults in secondary schools (as pupils have multiple teachers). Additional points for consideration include the longevity of key adults to provide consistency and the possible need for a team approach, to help transfer attachments and support key adults in a potentially emotionally challenging, as well as rewarding role.

The crucial role the key adult plays in ensuring that voice is heard in PEP meetings is echoed in the Tilbury et al. (2014) study, in which participants spoke of plans being developed without their input, due to professionals not listening to their voice. The key adult therefore has an important mediating role.

Peer relationships

The importance of peers is reflected in the theme 'friendship and belonging' in the literature review. Friendships are conceived as a major source of belonging within school, providing a sense of normality for LACYP and helping to mitigate the risk of bullying (Berridge, 2017).

Participants used words such as 'fun', 'protective', 'kind' and 'supportive' to describe friends, suggesting the importance of emotional ties and thus the promotion of emotional school engagement. The identification of friendship as a key protective factor is consistent with the finding that the quality of reciprocal friendship can temper the effects of maltreatment and low self-esteem (Bolger et al., 1998).

However, the ambivalent feelings expressed by some of the participants - relating to feeling lost and confused with peers, highlights the impact of the corollary of acceptance and belonging. Feelings of rejection are connected to low school engagement levels and an increased chance of non-attendance (Clemens et al., 2017). Some LACYP may find themselves more vulnerable to difficulties with peers if they display poor emotional regulation and thus difficulty conforming to school norms, due to complex trauma or adverse life experiences (Pears et al., 2010). This introduces a tension: Friendship is a key protective factor for LACYP, as it promotes a strong sense of belonging; however, friendships can

also be more difficult to establish and maintain for LACYP. This suggests that some LACYP may welcome or at least benefit from social support (Tilbury et al., 2014). After all, social competence within peer relationships has a significant long-term impact on emotional wellbeing and psychological functioning for all children (Elliott et al., 2001).

One implication is the need for schools to explore evidence-based approaches to peer support and social skills development, which encompass emotional regulation approaches and the reciprocal role of peers, thereby encouraging generalisation (Spence, 2003). Although a wealth of research exists on what works well for children with Autism, there appears to be a dearth of research on the efficacy of interventions and approaches to promote peer relationships for looked after children or children with attachment difficulties. Since friendships for some LACYP can be more enduring than transient relationships, due to changes of staff or placement (Wigley et al., 2011), this would appear to be an area worthy of future research.

<u>School community and responsibility</u>

This theme reflects participants' views on the significance of adults giving them specific roles and responsibilities to fulfil i.e. a show of trust. This is reflected in Benard's (1991) research, which indicates that the provision of responsibilities fosters a sense of belonging, enhancing motivation/emotional engagement. Quality statement four of the NICE guidelines (2019) for LACYP states: 'LACYP have ongoing opportunities to explore and make sense of identity and relationships.' Roles and responsibilities can act as a vehicle for this kind of

exploration, promoting a sense of community, self-esteem and the respect of peers and adults.

For one participant, being given the responsibility of deputy head boy was expressed as a distinct turning-point in his school life *"…I guess it changed my mood that I was, 'cause in year five I used to be really bad…"* This child also reflected on his brother's chances of being selected for the same role, given the fact that he had recently been excluded. LACYP can be more sensitised to smaller stressors than the general population, which can be interpreted as anti-social behaviour, reducing acceptance by peers and teachers (Minnard, 2002). Being given responsibility is perhaps a medium for breaking this negative cycle, by providing social capital and conveying high expectations, impacting positively on self-esteem.

However, it is important to note that the significance of responsibility and community may alter with age and stage, reflecting shifting perceptions of peers and what constitutes social capital. This is of particular relevance for secondary schools when considering the potential benefits of responsibilities. It also reflects the importance of listening to the views of LACYP and what they consider valuable, so they are at the centre of decision-making and therefore more than passive beneficiaries of the roles assigned to them (Martin & Jackson, 2002). This is consistent with Ungar's (2004) research with 'troubled youth' in which he concludes that a significant aspect of resilience is the ability to form one's own identity, rather than having an identity forced upon oneself. The promotion of a positive identity for LACYP is a key endeavour, as children who have not experienced consistent reciprocal interactions and nurture in their early years are

143

more likely to internalise a negative working model of themselves and their relationships (Fonagy & Target, 1997).

'Voice and choice' can therefore be interpreted as an additional protective factor, highlighted in the statutory guidance for the promotion of education for looked after children (DfE, 2018), in which the importance of fostering a culture of listening to LACYP is highlighted. This is consistent with Lundy's (2007) conclusion that 'space' must be inclusive and therefore embrace the voice of all children, not just those who are articulate. This places the responsibility firmly on adults to adapt methods that enable all children, including LACYP, to give voice to their views and participate in a meaningful way that transcends tokenism.

Developing skills through clubs

Participants' reflections that clubs develop broader life skills is consistent with Benard's (1991) conclusion that extra-curricular experiences promote protective factors at the individual as well as community level. They include problem-solving, planning and goal setting, which have a high degree of cross-over with the metacognitive skills required to promote cognitive school engagement.

One participant spoke of the healing aspect of drama club and also the positive emotional effects of expressing herself through dance. This is consistent with Gilligan's (2000) view that spare time experiences can have a therapeutic value for LACYP, in addition to a 'high participation value.' The latter is reflected in the Neal (2017) study, in which participants cited clubs as far more than the pursuit of hobbies, but places of acceptance and vital support systems. Other participants highlighted the importance of clubs providing opportunities to excel at something.

This resonates with the Year 5 child who spoke of the sheer joy of being able to show off his skills when attending football club.

Participants also spoke of extra-curricular clubs promoting peer relationships that may even transfer into school. Such clubs offer opportunities for LACYP to practise and generalise social skills in a less formal context and make broader social connections that promote a sense of belonging (Francis et al., 2021).

Extra-curricular clubs therefore fulfil many different functions that promote behavioural school engagement for vulnerable children i.e. promoting attendance (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997). School-based clubs can provide a broader motivation to attend school by increasing confidence, promoting peer relationships and simply being 'fun.' This emphasises the importance of carers and staff listening to children's wishes and matching their needs and interests to a range of activities, as outlined by Gilligan (2000). These activities can give some LACYP an opportunity to develop perseverance and dedication, which may be harder to demonstrate within the confines of the curriculum, especially if the child/young person experiences additional special educational needs. Such clubs can also form part of a much- needed routine for many LACYP.

3.4.5 Summary of Key Limitations

The current study is exploratory in nature and has a small sample size of eight children. Lack of prolonged field engagement is acknowledged as a limitation of the study. Only one interview with each child was possible due to difficulties recruiting participants when more than one interview was requested (a follow-up interview was planned originally).

Only the age, gender and type of placement of the LACYP interviewed were collected. The gathering of special category data e.g. relating to special educational needs (SEN) would have provided valuable context to the sample, enabling the reader to make comparisons with their population of interest. Similarly, limiting the population sample to one key stage would have promoted transferability by assisting the reader to identify the specific phase of education the LACYP were in. The implications for transferability are acknowledged as a limitation of the study.

An additional limitation of the study is the reliance on one data source – interviews (although drawings served as an additional form of data). Multiple data collection methods provide a form of data triangulation, to increase trustworthiness and therefore credibility. An example is the use of drawing diaries kept by children over a period of time, that capture thoughts and feelings relating to school engagement on any given day.

Considerations relating to child voice prompted the researcher to reflect on how credibility could have been developed further in this study, given more time. Credibility refers to "how vivid and faithful the description of the phenomenon is" (Beck, 1993, p.264). Member checking would have been an ideal vehicle to explore with LACYP the extent to which the analysis reflected their views. This could have been achieved by either discussing their transcript together (first level member checking) or reflecting on the thematic map together (second level member checking).

Another limitation identified is the simple translation of themes as protective factors, which has resulted in a lack of specificity and therefore practical utility in some cases e.g. 'Teaching Practice that helps me.'

The current study is very broad, in that it explores protective factors at all three ecological levels: the individual, family and school/community. The key concept of school engagement is also very comprehensive in focus i.e. encompassing behavioural, affective and cognitive elements. The breadth of the research is therefore a limitation, in that it is difficult to focus on any one element of school engagement in detail and how different levels of protective factors might impact on each element. Future research could take any one of the three ecological levels and explore impact on any one of the three elements of school engagement, using qualitative or mixed methods approaches.

The critical appraisal (chapter 4) will explore the following in depth: Strengths and limitations of the research (including methodological weaknesses), implications for the topic of psychology and educational psychology practice, implications for future research, ethical dilemmas and a reflection on epistemology.

3.4.5 Summary of key limitations
3.5 Conclusion

The overall analysis of protective factors in this study is consistent with the conclusion by Newmann et al. (1992) that school engagement levels are higher in schools with clear support structures, caring teachers with clear expectations, the provision of choice, peer acceptance and a community that fosters a sense of belonging.

147

One can see that there is significant overlap between the protective factors identified by this sample of LACYP and protective factors for the general population, outlined in appendix 1 - for example, 'support for education.' However, due to the importance of context and the need to look at what works for specific populations, it is highly likely that a number of these factors take on additional significance for LACYP, and/or require a different vehicle of expression to reflect very personal needs and high stress backgrounds. For example, although low level stress is documented as having a 'steeling effect' for the majority of children, consistent with the concept of 'self-righting' (Rutter, 1985), additional stress may have a less positive effect for children with a history of chronic adversity and high cortisol levels. This is consistent with the view of Luthar et al. (2006), that protective factors must be relevant to each special population, rather than applied in a blanket fashion.

The breadth of protective factors identified is consistent with the view that children and young people who have experienced a turbulent and traumatic background, require multiple protective factors and therefore a broad spectrum of family, school and community support (O'Higgins et al., 2017). In effect, complex problems require complex solutions and relational ruptures require a sustained relational approach to promote healing (Bomber, 2007). A sustained relational approach appears to be the foundation of protective factors at all three ecological levels, as identified by the LACYP interviewed.

Part 4 Critical appraisal

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of the research was to hear the voice of LACYP relating to their perception of the key protective factors that promote their school engagement at the individual, family and school/community levels. Findings were then used to inform a protective factors framework to aid carers and professionals to support this population with school engagement. The critical appraisal extends the findings of the empirical paper, enabling a greater reflection on the implications of the research and a critique of the research conducted. First, reflections on epistemology, including the researcher's epistemological position will be outlined. This is followed by an exploration of the rationale of the design, measures and methods of analysis chosen, with a reflection on strengths and limitations, including a consideration of alternative approaches. This is followed by a reflection on the credibility of the research and ethical considerations that arose during the research process. Implications for understanding and knowledge in educational psychology will then be explored, followed by implications for EP practice and future directions for research. Finally, there is a reflection on the contribution of this study to the research base, ending with a personal reflection on the research process.

4.2 Reflections on Epistemology

Research paradigms are defined by the ontological and epistemological positions of the researcher (Mertens, 2010). Clarity regarding ontology and epistemology provide a clear rationale for the research objectives adopted and the methodology chosen. The philosophical standpoint of the researcher also

149

impacts on the interpretation and analysis of findings (Creswell, 2007; Willig, 2013).

4.2.1 Ontology and epistemology relating to Personal Construct Psychology

Although personal construct psychology (PCP) is often associated with therapeutic use, it is utilised as a research methodology in this study. PCP is acknowledged variously as a form of constructivism (Burr et al., 2012), in which "events are construed through a system of meaning that each individual builds." (Burr et al., 2012, p. 2). Despite appearances, the implications for ontology are not clear-cut. Constructivism does not assume either a realist or idealist conception of what there is to be known. Chiari and Nuzzo (1996) espouse the idea that constructivism seeks to challenge the simple dichotomy between realism and idealism. This is via epistemological constructivism.

Epistemological constructivists believe in an external reality, but this reality can only be known via the observers' personal constructions of it. This fits with Kelly's (1955) analogy of the 'personal scientist' via constructive alternativism, in which reality is not revealed but constructed via various templates the person creates, tests and adapts. Although Gergen (1994) interprets Kelly's 'personal scientist' metaphor as embracing a positivist stance, this is challenged by Walker (1992) who explains that Kelly (1955) talks of the 'predictive efficiency' and therefore viability of constructs, rather than their accuracy or alignment with an external reality.

The researcher's epistemological position

An emphasis upon multiple realities constructed by culture, context and language (Gergen, 1994) has led to social constructionism distancing itself from constructivist approaches, which are considered to embrace a 'closed loop' meaning making system. Closed loop refers to the Piagetian emphasis on internal cognitive processes rather than societal influence. However, the emphasis both approaches place on the central importance of meaning-making suggests an inherent compatibility (Raskin, 2002). The child or young person does not have to be conceived as isolated, but as one who constructs reality through social interaction and cultural engagement. The researcher's epistemological position reflects the importance of human meaning making in this social context. It can therefore be described as a form of social constructivism. Central to social constructivism is the idea that each participant's way of perceiving and ordering the world is equally valid and one learns through interpersonal interaction (Crotty, 1998).

It is the emphasis on each participant's search for meaning making i.e. reflecting on protective factors that promote school engagement that has led to the identification of a constructivist epistemology in this study. The researcher's view that meaning making is firmly located in a social context i.e. the children's cultural, social and linguistic environment (rather than a closed loop) has led to the more specific identification of social constructivism as the theoretical framework that underpins this research. The researcher's epistemological position reflects a view that LACYP's personal constructs are informed by their lived social experiences and therefore contextually bound.

151

The attempt to hear the views of LACYP in relation to the key protective factors that promote their school engagement rests on the premise that participants are knowledgeable about their realities and are able to express that knowledge effectively (Bergold, 2007). This premise is shared by Kelly (1955) and Stevenson (2014):

> *"The silenced are not just incidental to the curiosity of the researcher but are the masters of inquiry into the underlying causes of the events in their world."* (p. 23)

The qualitative nature of the research does not lend itself to a simple generalisation of findings, but rather an emphasis on transferability - an application of findings that are contextually bound (Morse et al., 2002). This is consistent with a social constructivist epistemology.

4.3 Rationale for theoretical focus, design, measures and methods of analysis

Strengths and limitations will be threaded throughout the discussion of the rationale for the selection of design measures and methods of analysis, including consideration of alternatives. This should enable a thorough critical reflection of the relative merits and weaknesses of the study. Qualitative critical appraisal tools including those from the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP), Joanna Briggs Institute (2014) and Brantlinger et al. (2005) have been used to provide a robust framework for discussing strengths and limitations.

Robson (2002) outlines the compatibility of qualitative methods with a constructivist methodology. The emphasis on human meaning making influenced decisions to use open-ended questions in conjunction with drawings, encouraging the sharing of constructs via a comfortable medium that also enabled in-depth exploration of personal constructs. Furthermore, qualitative

research fits well with exploratory studies that focus on risk and/or protective factors (Ungar, 2003).

4.3.1 Choice of Theoretical Focus – Protective Factors

This study focuses on the social-ecological model of resilience (Ungar, 2013), through the lens of protective factors. This acknowledges that it is LACYP's interactions with multiple dynamic systems that promotes their resilience. For example, environmental factors are more impactful than individual characteristics for children who have experienced maltreatment (Klasen et al., 2010). Furthermore, the environment in which a child lives has potential to either facilitate or inhibit gene expression (Ungar et al., 2013).

However, the concept of protective factors has a number of limitations. Rutter (1987) summarises thus:

"The search is not for broadly defined protective factors, but rather, for the developmental and situational mechanisms involved in protective processes" (p.317).

Rutter (1987) explains the importance of exploring the processes or mechanisms that identify how and why some children cope in times of adversity. This is through dynamic actions, circumstances and events, rather than static factors that may not be nuanced enough to apply to specific populations. For this reason, Rutter (1987) contends that protective factors are of 'limited value when trying to find new approaches to prevention.'

Ungar et al. (2013) explore the concept of 'differential impact', which illuminates this criticism further. The impact of protective factors differs over time and across contexts. He provides the example of smaller class sizes as a protective factor,

which may have a modest impact across a whole population or have a large or insignificant effect in the life of someone experiencing high levels of adversity.

The interactive nature of protective mechanisms or processes therefore present as having more utility as a focus for research than the static term 'protective factor.' However, the current empirical study was limited to one-off interviews, snapshots that were unlikely to yield information relating to underlying dynamic processes. Perhaps a case study design (Yin, 2003), using multiple data sources, a more bounded population sample and prolonged field engagement would lend itself more to an exploration of protective mechanisms. The current research question was limited to 'what' LACYP identified as the key protective factors that promote their school engagement. A case study design is more concerned with the questions 'why?' and 'how?' (Yin, 2003), which are highly compatible with the interactive focus of protective mechanisms. For example, examining processes involved in changes in life trajectory such as key turning-points in children's lives. A longitudinal research design could accomplish this even more effectively, by exploring the relative impact of protective mechanisms over the life-span.

4.3.2 Participants, Recruitment strategy and Transferability

Due to the potentially vulnerable population, the researcher asked the local Virtual School (VS) senior management team to identify potential participants who fitted the inclusion criteria and were not at a vulnerable stage in their lives e.g. subject to court proceedings or a change in placement. The choice not to contact LACYP known to the researcher or to work with schools with a pre-

154

existing relationship with the researcher was hoped to reduce potential pressure to participate in the research and provide perceived desirable responses.

The researcher requested that a cross-section of children be identified in preference to drawing participants from the LACYP pupil voice forum. This was to enable a broader range of LACYP to have their voice heard, including those who were considered 'quiet' or 'challenging' due to emotional difficulties. A mix of genders was also requested. Due to ethical considerations, it was requested that all participants be in stable care placements.

The guidelines for a desirable number of participants when using Thematic Analysis vary greatly. Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest between six to ten participants for a small project using interviews. Guest et al. (2006) suggest a similar number of participants when using qualitative interviews (six to twelve participants). However, justification for the numbers provided is rarely provided (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Fugard and Potts (2015) suggest that the implicit rationale for proposed numbers often rests on a balance between having enough data to demonstrate patterns/themes, but not so much data that the researcher is overwhelmed. Eight participants were therefore interviewed for this study.

The researcher experienced difficulties obtaining pupil participation for two main reasons. The first related to the research being conducted only a term or two after children returned to school after a prolonged national lockdown, due to COVID 19. The second related to the need to gain consent from multiple stakeholders to proceed.

The researcher's original plan (outlined in the UCL REC application) had been to conduct a face to face interview with each child twice, to build trust and act as a

rudimentary form of prolonged field engagement, to promote dependability (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Alanen (1992) advocates the use of a series of interviews rather than 'parachuting in', to build such crucial relationships. This is underpinned by the view that children's views are fluid and complex, challenging the notion that one can capture the 'authentic voice' of CYP, as if it were fixed and essential. This is consistent with the epistemological position taken in this study – social constructivism.

Only one interview with each child was possible due to the logistical challenges outlined above. The request for one rather than two interviews increased willingness to engage in the research. Lack of prolonged field engagement is acknowledged as a limitation of this study. Due to concerns regarding COVID 19, a decision was taken to interview each child remotely via MS Teams, to mitigate risk.

The researcher used Lundy's (2007) evaluation checklist to appraise how well they elicited child voice through the interview process (appendix 18). A decision was taken to ask each child to complete this at a separate time to the interview to minimise desirability bias, which affected the return rate (63 per cent). Of the evaluations returned, all categories were awarded the maximum score. However, the researcher reflected that despite the timing, a desirability bias was still highly likely, due to the time spent with each child and likelihood that it was completed with their key adult. The exercise therefore felt tokenistic rather than meaningful.

Ultimately it is the reader who will decide whether a study's findings are transferable to their population of interest. It is therefore incumbent upon the

researcher to provide enough contextual information for the reader to be able to judge congruence or otherwise (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, only the age, gender and type of placement of the LACYP was collected. The gathering of special category data e.g. relating to special educational needs (SEN) would have provided valuable context to the sample, enabling the reader to make comparisons with their population of interest.

Similarly, clearly demarcating a population also promotes transferability by enabling the reader to identify the specific context of the study sample. In this study, a decision was taken to interview LACYP from Years five to eight. This spans two key stages (key stages two and three), across both primary and secondary phases of education. The clear differences between the two phases presents a challenge to transferability i.e. the ability to judge whether the protective factors identified are more pertinent to one phase than another. It would therefore have been preferable to limit the sample population to one key stage. The decision to broaden the sample was a pragmatic one, due to the difficulties with recruitment (specifically gaining consent) during the COVID 19 pandemic. The backdrop of the pandemic itself also impacts on transferability. The implications for transferability are acknowledged as a limitation of the study.

4.3.3 Data collection methods

Semi-structured interviews were used flexibly in the study i.e. points of interest were followed up on. There was a concerted effort to follow the child's lead e.g. change the order of questions to be as responsive as possible to their lines of thinking and build rapport (Beaver, 2007). A more rigid interview structure for standardisation purposes was not consistent with the research questions or

157

epistemology of the study. However, the use of PCP tools necessitated some structure to the interview.

The interviews took place in the familiar environment of the school, in a private space. The researcher chose to use individual rather than group interviews, consistent with the use of PCP, which focus on eliciting the views of LACYP in depth.

The use of drawings within the interview (during the Ideal School activity) was hoped to provide a familiar vehicle for children to communicate at their developmental level, encouraging them to feel relaxed and triangulate their verbal responses (Maxwell, 2006). However, after being offered a choice, not all children chose to draw.

The use of dichotomous constructs (dichotomy corollary – Kelly, 1955) e.g. Salmon lines, could be argued to limit a more nuanced exploration of views that cannot be represented by a simple dichotomy. However, laddering and pyramiding techniques (Kelly, 1955; Beaver, 1996) attempted to elicit richer and more nuanced views. Furthermore, according to Ravenette (1980), eliciting a construct and its opposite promotes a 'polarity of thinking', which illuminates a child's personal constructs when the researcher explores what each conception 'represents and denies.'

The decision to adopt a positive focus to the questions was ethically driven. However, it is possible that if the LACYP interviewed had been asked neutral questions, or questions regarding aspects that undermine their school engagement, it could have encouraged richer discussions and therefore yielded more detailed and nuanced findings. For example, being asked about a time

158

they did not enjoy coming into school. Although a 'polarity of thinking' was elicited when using the Salmon line activity, the negative pole was not explored in and of itself.

Similarly, the questions posed were all open, to encourage a depth of response and therefore richer data, consistent with the findings of Ponizovsky-Bergelson et al. (2019). However, upon reflection, the use of direct questions might have served to provide direct answers that could have been built upon with further questioning. This could have provided more focus to the interview. For example, asking 'Do you like (various aspects of) school?' before asking what aspects of school encourage the young person to attend. This links to the point above regarding openness to a range of responses that could enrich the discussion and therefore findings.

A limitation of the study is the reliance on one data source – interviews (although drawings served as an additional form of data). Multiple data collection methods provide a form of data triangulation, to increase trustworthiness and therefore credibility. An example is the use of drawing diaries kept by children over a period of time that capture thoughts and feelings relating to school engagement on any given day. Such data would be more contextually bound and serve as a form of prolonged field engagement without the need for additional direct EP time. For example, Sugden (2013) asked younger LACYP to keep notepad diaries over a two-week period when he explored views regarding what helps LACYP to learn. The diaries were then used as a stimulus for discussion during semi-structured interviews. Other child-led methods include photograph elicitation, which give CYP a sense of autonomy and ownership (Briggs et al., 2014).

159

4.3.4 Pilot

A pilot interview was conducted with a looked after girl in Year 5. This was both a challenging and illuminating experience, resulting in a number of changes to the interview schedule. The researcher's first reflection was on the child's lack of trust towards a stranger and need to assert control over the environment. More rapport building and potentially humorous activities were therefore inserted into the beginning of the schedule. The researcher also reflected that the structure of the interview should be fluid, to maintain flow and energy. The role of the key adult in this interview was crucial in building a bridge of trust.

When introduced to the Ideal School activity, the young lady refused to draw, explaining that she didn't like drawing and simply wanted to talk. As a result, the researcher offered a choice to each child i.e. to draw or simply discuss their ideal school.

Discussion of the non-ideal self was challenging, as it seemed to elicit unhappy memories of specific experiences. This was compounded by the fact that in the activity, the child is invited to conceptualise their non-ideal self before their ideal self, starting on a negative. Furthermore, the questions for both Ideal Self and Ideal School felt repetitive, reducing enjoyment and richness of response. The final interview schedule therefore omitted the Ideal Self activity, replacing it with a salmon line activity that still enabled the elicitation of personal constructs, but at a step removed i.e. 'think of someone you know who…' Each young person was then invited to apply each construct to their own lives and explore implications for school engagement, in the context of school/family/themselves.

The final interview schedule was therefore more streamlined, had a greater emphasis on rapport building and included a broader range of activities, whilst retaining PCP techniques.

4.3.5 Data analysis

The rationale and process of data analysis is outlined in the empirical paper (section 3.2.7). The following is therefore an appraisal of the use of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) instead of alternative approaches to data analysis, including the relative strengths and limitations of RTA and its application in this study.

Both an inductive (data driven) and deductive approach was adopted in this study. The former is consistent with the epistemology of the study and the importance of hearing the voice of each child, with an openness to new views and ideas. The deductive element relates to the use of pre-existing research questions, PCP tools to structure the interviews and engagement with the relevant literature in the field. RTA is a tool that not only tolerates the tension between these different approaches, but embraces them both, forming a hybrid approach to data analysis.

Familiarity with relevant research can enrich analysis by priming the researcher to more nuanced features of the data (Tuckett, 2005). Conversely, it is possible that pre-existing knowledge of protective factors may have led the researcher to a form of confirmatory bias i.e. increased attendance to data that aligned with research in the area. The researcher therefore attempted to remain vigilant and record contradictory data throughout the analysis phase e.g. relating to feelings of ambivalence towards birth siblings.

The social constructivist epistemology of the study embraces the following

tension outlined by Samuels and Pryce, (2008):

> *"Knowledge is socially constructed; one's research is shaped by both the*
> *subjective world of one's participants as well as the assumptive world of the*
> *researcher."* (pp. 1199-1200)

RTA is acknowledged as a flexible method in that it can be used across a range

of theoretical approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2019) and is therefore congruent with

constructivist epistemologies, reflected in this study.

There is an acknowledgement that the current study is exploratory in nature and

has a small sample size of eight children, so no claims are made regarding data

saturation, as would be expected in a grounded theory of data analysis (Ando et

al., 2014). The social constructivist epistemology of the study promotes the value

of every voice of the LACYP interviewed, without requiring a critical threshold of

participant numbers to lend weight to the findings.

Some of the advantages of RTA include its ability to highlight similarities and

differences across a data set, its view of participants as active partners and ease

of use for a single researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2019). However, there is an

acknowledgement that due to its very flexibility, RTA can be applied in an

idiosyncratic fashion, to the expense of methodological rigour (Braun & Clarke,

2019). To address the concern regarding credibility, the researcher evaluated

their application of RTA against Braun and Clarke's (2013) quality checklist for

undertaking a robust thematic analysis (appendix 19):

Table 12

Quality checklist for undertaking a good thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013)

Process	Criteria	Application in this study

Transcription	1	Both MS Teams transcription and MS Teams recordings used to triangulate accuracy of transcripts (Teams transcripts can contain inaccuracies).
Coding	2	Each interview (data item) was given equal attention and coding was applied consistently throughout the data set.
	3	All codes/themes were reported, consistent with the aims of the study. Illustrative quotes were drawn from across the data set.
	4	Every extract for every code was collated for each theme.
	5	Themes were checked for Patton's (1991) dual criteria: 'internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity'
	6	See above
Analysis	7	Analysis went beyond literal interpretation of data to increasing levels of abstraction: code, descriptive theme, analytic theme
	8	Codes derived from verbatim illustrative quotes, staying faithful to the voice of the child
	9	Analysis structured and organised into a coherent thematic map.
	10	Analytic narrative based upon verbatim quotes, which underpin the codes/themes.
Overall	11	The analysis from start to end was a time- consuming process with in-built checks e.g. re-reading transcripts and re-organising codes and themes into a coherent analysis.
Written report	12	The rationale for TA in this study was explored, including congruence with the theoretical framework of the study (social constructivism).
	13	Exemplar transcript and step by step explanation of analysis provided in empirical paper.
	14	Coherence between TA/use of language and the study's social constructivist approach.
	15	Active collaboration between researcher and participants explored. Emphasis on elicitation of personal constructs rather than themes emerging passively.

RTA offers a systematic approach to data analysis, enabling the researcher to

identify the frequency of codes, but also encouraging analysis of the meaning of

illustrative quotes in context – promoting a richer and more subtle form of analysis (Joffe & Yardley, 2004).

However, RTA can also be viewed as reductionist compared to approaches such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which seek to immerse the researcher into the rich world of the participant and encourage a depth of researcher reflexivity (Shaw, 2010). However, IPA is underpinned by a phenomenological epistemology and therefore not congruent with the study's social constructivist theoretical position. Furthermore, the researcher required a data analysis method that could be used across an entire data set to look at recurring patterns, codes and themes.

Another alternative to the use of RTA is Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) (Mills et al., 2006). This is an inductive approach to data analysis which aligns with the study's epistemology (social constructivism). CGT is most often used when no adequate prior theory exists within the research domain (Lauridsen & Higginbottom, 2013). However, although exploratory in nature, the current study is underpinned by theories relating to protective factors that promote school engagement, outlined in the literature review.

A viable alternative method of analysis would have been the use of narrative research. This approach is compatible with social constructivism, as it is based on the premise that people's personal narratives best represent their lived experiences. The narrative approach transcends a method for data analysis. It would need to have been reflected in the interview schedule via the questions asked of LACYP, to enable them to share their narratives in depth.

In an effort to stay as close as possible to the voice of the children, codes and themes were generated without reference to a protective factors framework. The use of a framework i.e. individual, family and school/community factors was only applied in the discussion section, to address the research questions and consider implications for educational professionals.

4.3.6 Credibility of the study

Dunsmuir and Frederickson (2014) explain that the trustworthiness of qualitative analysis can be promoted by coding transcripts independently, followed by a comparison and evaluation of codes. Regular consultation between investigators and inter-rater reliability can reduce researcher bias.

Investigator triangulation is based on the premise that some interpretations are more 'accurate' than others. The epistemology of this study (social constructivism) acknowledges the co-existence of both the participant's personal constructs and the researcher's theoretical underpinnings, both of which create meaning. However, the researcher was still eager to understand how their own perspectives and values impacted on the analysis and reporting of themes. Peer debriefing (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) was therefore used as a reflective tool to consider how the researcher balanced staying as close as possible to the voice of LACYP (consistent with the research questions), whilst co-constructing meaning during the analysis phase i.e. organising data into codes and themes.

Peer debriefing is a flexible approach, which can span different aspects of the research process, ranging from inception to written report (Spall, 1998). The researcher shared all codes and the thematic map with two EPs experienced in applying qualitative data analysis techniques. Points of discussion included:

Choice of language, whether the language used reflected that used by the LACYP interviewed, how codes hung together to form themes (internal homogeneity) and whether all themes were entirely distinct from one another (external heterogeneity).

The peer debriefing process encouraged the researcher to keep re-visiting their axiology (staying close to the voice of LACYP) by going back to the transcripts and checking the exact words used by LACYP relating to any areas of ambivalence e.g. the purpose of 'outdoor spaces' and whether they were viewed as an extension of the classroom environment or served a distinct function. The wording of codes and themes was also discussed. For example, was 'belonging' a term initiated by the children or introduced via the interview schedule? How consistent was this with the spirit of PCP in which the emphasis should be on the children's constructs, rather than the researcher's?

Considerations relating to child voice prompted the researcher to reflect on how credibility could have been developed further in this study, given more time. Credibility refers to "how vivid and faithful the description of the phenomenon is" (Beck, 1993, p.264). Member checking would have been an ideal vehicle to explore with LACYP the extent to which the analysis reflected their views. This could have been achieved by either discussing their transcript together (first level member checking) or reflecting on the thematic map together (second level member checking).

Reflecting on the peer debriefing session itself, in future the researcher could present data to peers at an earlier stage in the analysis, before higher levels of

abstraction i.e. provide transcripts with and without codes. This would enable a richer discussion of the points raised above and a greater level of transparency.

4.3.7 Ethical considerations whilst conducting the research

Ethical considerations for this study were considered in the empirical paper. Special consideration was given to section 10 of the Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2014), 'Safeguards for working with vulnerable populations' when designing the study. The following section explores reflections on ethical issues that arose during the research, in the context of guiding ethical frameworks. A reflective journal was kept to document any ethical issues as they arose, informing future interviews (Houghton et al., 2010).

In the framing research phase (McFarlane, 2009), special consideration was given to the choice of questions, techniques and language used with LACYP. This was to minimise the ethical vice of recklessness (McFarlane, 2009), by avoiding potentially distressing issues. However, as the interviews progressed, it became clear that simple avoidance was not straight-forward as children would sometimes raise personal issues that could be potentially distressing e.g. relating to birth family. The researcher therefore had to employ ethical sensitivity (Lepper, 1996) in order to judge the appropriate level of response and follow the child's lead (non-verbally as well as verbally), in order that they felt listened to but not exposed. The researcher also developed a management protocol to help mitigate psychological risk, in accordance with guidance from the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics: 'Maximise benefit and minimise harm (British Psychological Society, 2021, 2.4).

The same ethical principles guided the researcher's decision to omit the Ideal Self activity from the interview schedule (see section 4.3.4). This was based on the activity being potentially more intrusive than other PCP activities, producing a dissonance between the child's perception of self and ideal self, with little time to explore further.

During the interviews, there was a recognition that different methods suit different children and purposes, so LACYP should ideally be offered a choice and range of methods to express their views (Lightfoot & Sloper, 2002). This introduced a tension between a desire to be genuinely child-led whilst also adopting an approach judged to be best suited to hearing the voice of the child (PCP). A decision was therefore taken to offer children a choice of drawing or simply talking during the Ideal School activity and introducing a more flexible PCP activity to the interview schedule (Salmon lines).

The reflective journal documented ethical issues relating to consent. The study relied on the child's key adult and foster carer to explain the interview purpose and process using an infographic in advance of the study. This was to avoid the child feeling under pressure to give consent on the day. However, it became evident that for a minority of children this had been completed in a cursory manner (due to time constraints). The researcher therefore went through the infographic and checked consent at the beginning of each interview. On reflection, a pre-interview meeting to gain informed consent would have been preferable, even if logistically challenging.

The researcher reflected that when working with a vulnerable population and inherent power imbalance, assent is as important as consent. The researcher

was therefore careful to monitor non-verbal communication as an expression of willingness to participate (British Psychological Society, 2014, 4.7). This was particularly important during the pilot interview when the researcher asked the young person if they wanted to continue, and they answered 'no.' The question was prompted by the young person's body language and increasing length of time to respond.

There is an acknowledgement that the presence of an adult stranger can amplify the power dynamics in an individual interview (Robson, 2002). The presence of the child's key adult was hoped to mitigate this effect to some extent, promoting safety and trust (Gibson, 2012). However, the presence of the key adult may have increased desirability bias. The researcher's reflective journal detailed that in seven out of the eight interviews the key adult was present but did not take an active role, allowing the child space to answer for themselves. However, their sheer presence could have impacted on the child's responses. This may have been exacerbated by the controlled space of school and an implicit pressure to give the perceived most desirable answer. The presence of a key adult introduced an additional tension: comfort and containment versus confidentiality. Despite the tensions outlined, the guiding ethical principles of beneficence and sensitivity (Lepper, 1996) guided the decision to invite the child's key adult to the interviews.

During the negotiating phase of the study (McFarlane, 2009) one foster carer reflected carefully on the invitation for her foster child to be involved in the study, but eventually declined. The foster carer really challenged the researcher's ethical thinking by asking about the direct benefits of engagement in the research for the young person, should he participate. The researcher had to be careful to

169

remain respectful rather than employ the ethical vice of manipulation (McFarlane, 2009) by exaggerating claims regarding personal benefits. A broader reflection relates to the need for research to promote Social Responsibility: 'The aim of generating psychological knowledge should be to support beneficial outcomes' (British Psychological Society, 2014, 2.3). The question is, for whom? Outcomes may benefit the individual or common good, or both. In this case, although the interview experience was designed to be as positive as possible and the research was high in ethical motivation (Rest, 1982), there was little opportunity to effect change for the individual child. It was incumbent upon the researcher to communicate this in a transparent way, despite the risk of losing a potential participant.

4.4 Implications for understanding and knowledge in educational psychology

4.4.1 A Protective Factors Framework to promote School Engagement for LACYP

One of the aims of the literature review (thematic synthesis) was to use the findings to inform a protective factors framework, with particular application to the LACYP population. The protective factors framework demonstrates that many of the factors appear at more than one level, reflecting an interactionist perspective. For example, individual turning-points are often related to environmental safe havens at the family and community levels (Hass et al., 2014). The protective factors framework from the literature review is presented in table thirteen below:

Table 13

A Protective Factors Framework based on descriptive themes from the literature review

170

Individual level	Family level	School/Community level
Personal qualities	Stability, structure, safe space	Stability, structure, safe space
Turning-Points	High expectations and Hope	High expectations and Hope
	Supportive adults	Supportive adults
	Collaboration and Voice	Collaboration and Voice
	Turning-Points	Turning-Points
	Influence of birth family	Tailored educational support
		Friendship and Belonging
		Social/Leisure activities and access to facilities

Despite the heightened importance of school engagement for this population, many LACYP face multiple and complex demands within the school environment. Cognitive, social and emotional demands can be amplified by factors such as the impact of adverse experiences and high mobility. Qualitative research therefore offers an opportunity for LACYP to be active agents in their lives by identifying their own facilitators to school engagement. EPs can facilitate such research to inform educational practice with LACYP.

The literature review mainly synthesises the views of older students in care and care leavers, with a clear gap in the research pertaining to the views and experiences of younger school-aged LACYP. Gaining the views of school-aged

LACYP regarding the protective factors that promote their school engagement therefore formed the basis of the empirical study.

Table 14 illustrates the key protective factors that promote school engagement, as identified by the LACYP interviewed. These are based on the descriptive themes identified by Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Although divided into the three social ecological levels of resilience, there is an acknowledgement that protective factors are fluid, interactive and often reciprocal in nature. Similar to Table 13, a number of factors span more than one level. What is presented is therefore considered a best fit:

Table 14

Protective Factors at the three ecological levels

Protective Factors – Individual level	Protective Factors – Family level	Protective Factors- School/Community level
Positive behaviours for learning	Active Carers	Physical classroom environment and resources
Pro-social behaviours	Sensitivity to feelings about Birth Siblings	Teaching Practice that helps me
		Outdoor Spaces
		Key Adults
		Peer Relationships
		School Community and Responsibility
		Developing skills through clubs

In the same way as the literature review, the themes identified are not intended as an exhaustive list of stable factors, but rather a snapshot of protective factors identified by a specific sample of children at a particular stage in their lives and

are therefore contextually bound (Luthar et al., 2006). However, there is significant cross-over between the protective factors identified by the eight participants and those highlighted in the literature review. Table 15 provides an overall protective factors framework informed by both the literature review and empirical study. Cross-over of findings from both the review and empirical study (with broadly the same research question) can be viewed as a source of data triangulation, strengthening dependability.

Table 15

An overall Protective Factors Framework informed by the literature review and empirical study

Protective Factors – Individual level	Protective Factors – Family level	Protective Factors- School/Community level
Positive behaviours for learning	Active Carers	Friendship and Belonging/Peer relationships
Pro-social behaviours	Stability, structure, safe space	Stability, structure and safe space
Personal qualities e.g. perseverence	High expectations and Hope	High expectations and Hope
Turning-points	Supportive Adults	Supportive Adults (teaching and non-teaching)
	Collaboration and Voice	Collaboration and Voice
	Turning-points	Turning-points
	Influence of birth family	Tailored educational support
	Sensitivity to feelings about Birth Siblings	Physical classroom environment and resources

173

	Teaching Practice that helps me
	Outdoor Spaces
	School Community and Responsibility
	Social/leisure activities and access to facilities
	Developing skills through clubs

The following is a summary of the ways in which the protective factors from the review and empirical study converge and differ, presented at each ecological level.

<u>Individual level</u>

The protective factor 'Personal Qualities' identified in the literature review is reflected and operationalised further in the two individual protective factors outlined in the empirical study: 'Positive behaviours for learning' and 'Pro-social behaviours.' One limitation of the theme 'Personal Qualities' is its lack of specificity. It would have been more informative to have indicated what type of personal qualities were described in the literature. 'Personal qualities' is difficult to interpret as a protective factor. This indicates a potential limitation in simply translating themes as protective factors, without further interpretation.

Although 'Turning points' were not identified as a protective factor in the empirical study, some participants expressed a change in 'what they could do' as a turning point. For example, the participant who expressed the reciprocal influence of a change in attitude and being given increased responsibility (deputy head boy).

174

<u>Family level</u>

The protective factor 'Active Carers' highlighted in the empirical study is explicated further in the two protective factors identified in the literature review 'Stability, Structure and Safe Space' and 'Supportive Adults'. Perhaps the emphasis on 'active' carers reflects the context of home schooling during the COVID 19 pandemic and the far more active role of foster carers in the education of the LACYP in their care. 'High Expectations and Hope' are implicit to the empirical study, reflected for example in the code 'family give me extra work'.

The influence of birth family/siblings spanned both the literature review and empirical study. In both cases there was a combination of positive and negative feelings expressed. Older participants in the literature review reflected on 'breaking the cycle' by not being like their parents or reported a desire to make their parents proud. The emphasis in the empirical study was the direct positive and negative influence of birth siblings being in the same school, reflecting the daily lived experience of the school-aged participants.

The ambivalent feelings expressed indicate that 'Influence of birth family' cannot be identified as a straight-forward protective factor. It should be conceived in a broader sense i.e. a need to acknowledge the importance of the emotional influence of birth family for LACYP's school engagement.

<u>School/Community level</u>

The protective factor 'Stability, Structure and Safe Space' identified in the literature review is reflected in the protective factors: 'Physical classroom environment and resources' and 'Teaching practice that helps me' in the empirical study. For example, LACYP in the latter spoke of the desire for a quiet,

175

calm and predictable learning environment. They tended to focus on concrete examples of structure and support and a desire for active teaching and learning, reflecting their current experience. Older participants in the literature review reflected more broadly on the need for a stable school placement in the context of chaotic and turbulent life experiences and multiple placement moves.

'Collaboration and voice' was identified as a key protective factor in the literature review e.g. cross-system collaboration at a systems level. This was echoed in the code 'Voice and choice', which formed part of the protective factor 'School community and responsibility' in the empirical study. LACYP reflected that voice and choice facilitate a sense of ownership and responsibility and also increase motivation for learning. However, the focus for the LACYP interviewed was more on collaboration and voice at an individual rather than systems level and specifically in the school context.

Both the literature review and empirical study identified the importance of 'Friendship/Peer relationships' and 'Social and leisure activities.' The latter is reflected in the protective factors 'Developing skills through clubs' and 'Outside spaces'.

The protective factor 'Tailored educational support' in the literature review is discussed by LACYP in the empirical study under the theme 'Teaching practice that helps me'. Both highlight a desire for a continuum of support, although the former can be interpreted as including educational interventions in addition to helpful teaching practice in the classroom Similarly, the protective factor 'Supportive adults' in the literature review is echoed in the protective factor 'key adults' in the empirical study. However, the latter refers more specifically to a

designated non-teaching member of staff rather than supportive adults in multiple contexts.

4.4.2 Overview of protective factors

There seems to be a clear cross-over between the protective factors identified in the literature review and empirical study, suggesting they are complementary. However, it is important to note crucial differences in emphases. Older students in care and care leavers in the literature review tended to reflect more on broader and systemic factors. LACYP in the empirical study tended to provide more operational detail of the protective factors key to promoting their school engagement on a daily basis, reflective of their current experience and the weight of questions/activities focusing on school e.g. the Ideal School activity.

It is hoped that the protective factors identified in the empirical study contribute to the protective factors framework outlined in the literature review in two main ways: Firstly by providing more information on the individual protective factors LACYP identify as key to their school engagement and secondly by providing an exploration of protective factors that is more reflective of the current and lived experience of school-aged LACYP.

A protective factors framework can have practical utility for EPs. It can be used as a consultation and/or assessment tool to provide an idea of the pivotal protective factors in a child's life and those that have scope for development. It can then be used to inform interventions that increase or optimise protective factors to promote school engagement. Furthermore, there is an inherent logic to children who experience multiple and complex vulnerabilities requiring a multi-pronged collective approach, represented by protective factors at all levels.

Dearden (2004), suggests that such a framework can also be used as an evaluation tool for services and interventions designed for LACYP, by judging which protective factors the service/intervention enhances or neglects. EPs are well placed to assess, plan and evaluate interventions that embed protective factors, via their understanding of behaviour as communication and the eco-systemic approach they work within. The overarching protective factors framework can also be used by EPs as a consultation tool with staff and with young people themselves i.e. asking them to identify which of the protective factors needs to be strengthened and which ones might be used to harness difficulties.

One of the limitations identified is the simple translation of themes as protective factors, which has resulted in a lack of specificity and therefore practical utility in some cases e.g. 'personal qualities.'

Further research could refine the protective factors framework further by conducting research with different age ranges to inform which protective factors have greater influence on school engagement at different stages of the school journey.

4.5 Implications for EP Practice and for Future Directions for Research

Several implications of the research for schools and professionals were explored within the discussion section of the empirical paper. The following section will therefore focus on implications for EP practice specifically, although much of what is explored will also be relevant for schools and professionals.

As discussed earlier, the following implications are not based on the principle of generalisability. As a small-scale piece of qualitative research the implications

discussed are tentative suggestions framed within the context of transferability to a similar population of LACYP. Each implication therefore requires its own evaluation to judge the degree of transferability.

4.5.1 Protective Factors Framework

A possible future direction for the research is the sharing of a protective factors framework by the EP, which can be disseminated to school and professionals. This would help to identify LACYP areas of strength and development across the different levels to help shape a bespoke plan of support, via a consultation approach. Such a framework could act as an example of early intervention (focusing on prevention rather than amelioration of risk factors) and could be shared with other professionals e.g. specialist teachers and social workers, to build capacity, thereby increasing reach and impact. Crucially, the framework would need to be informed by child voice. One possibility is to map the protective factors framework onto an adapted version of the Ideal School activity (Moran, 2001) e.g. inviting children to draw their conceptions of ideal friendships, clubs etc.

4.5.2 Transition and Relational Approaches

Although the focus of the research was not on transition, it spanned key pre and post-secondary transition years. Findings could therefore inform transition planning facilitated by EPs and other professionals e.g. support with social connections, promotion of clubs as a source of friendship and self-esteem and work on normalising the ending and beginning of friendships. Questions relating to peer relationships/friendships could become a standing item within PEP transition meetings (Francis et al., 2021). EPs could have a role in training

179

mentors assigned from Year six to the end of Year seven, to provide relational consistency. Key adults from primary school could also be encouraged to check in with pupils in Year 7 (remotely) to demonstrate that they are being 'held in mind' (Bomber, 2007).

The prioritisation of LACYP's social connections and friendships at a whole school level encourages looking beyond 'within-child' deficits (Francis et al., 2021), with an emphasis on protective factors that incorporate the school/community level, as well as promoting individual protective factors. EPs could take on a key role in ensuring that relational interventions e.g. Nurture Groups (Bennathan and Boxall, 2013) are embedded within schools as part of a whole-school approach, as research shows that systemic approaches increase the effectiveness of targeted interventions (Demkowicz and Humphrey, 2019).

A model such as the one adopted by one local authority (Francis et al., 2021), in which LACYP are invited to a conference where they explore social connections with other LACYP in the area, could also promote a sense of belonging and minimise feelings of difference, due to having an in-care status.

4.5.3 Systems level work and Training

At a systemic level, EPs can also help schools to review policies and practices regarding the school engagement of LACYP. This could include EPs liaising with LACYP to inform such policies and practices. For example, behaviour policies that recognise the emotional basis of behaviour and conceive fairness according to need, rather than prioritising the same treatment of all pupils.

EPs can also work alongside professionals from their local virtual school team. This could include designing interventions and resources to promote different

180

aspects of school engagement e.g. a sense of belonging, motivation and metacognition. There is a plan to reflect learning from the research in future work with the virtual school team via the provision of a consultation service to foster carers and staff.   This will include a more explicit focus on the promotion of peer connections to nurture a sense of belonging (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2018) and less structured extra-curricular social opportunities, consistent with the findings in this study.

EPs and LACYP could design and deliver joint training, in which children and young people share a range of experiences of school participation and the corresponding effect on their levels of engagement. For example, reflections LACYP have shared regarding a positive impact on their motivation when teachers have encouraged them to 'have a say.' This strengths-based approach aligns well with models such as Appreciative Inquiry (Naude et al., 2014), led by LACYP and facilitated by the EP.

EPs are also well placed to provide group or individual supervision to key adults and foster carers, who may require their own source of emotional containment. Supervision could help foster carers to contain LACYP anxieties around transition. EPs could also use community psychology approaches to support foster carers e.g. the multi-family group approach (Moberg et al., 2007), designed to build protective factors for children across child, family and school/community levels, bridging the family-school gap.

4.5.4 EPs and the voice of LACYP

An implication of the research is how EPs can promote the voice of LACYP to inform practice, avoiding tokenism. Implicit to 'voice' is choice and agency.

Methods for eliciting the voice of LACYP include use of Personal Construct Psychology approaches such as the Ideal School (Moran, 2001) and Salmon lines (Salmon, 1988), the merits of which have already been explored. Alternative examples of approaches for eliciting the voice of LACYP regarding school engagement include the Multi-element model (MacDonald et al., 2010), Mapping the Landscape (Ripley, 2015) and Person-centred planning approaches such as 'Promoting Alternative Tomorrows with Hope' – PATH (Wood et al., 2019). The latter can be instrumental in helping LACYP identify aspirations and a trajectory for the future, to give a sense of purpose and increase motivation for school engagement.

Consideration could be given to offering Person-centred Planning approaches as standard practice to inform LACYP's Personal Educational Plans (PEPs).

The EP uses such methods regularly as part of their toolkit and could perhaps model and share with other professionals how they might best use them when working with LACYP.

4.6 Implications for Future Research

The current study is very broad, in that it explores protective factors at all three ecological levels: the individual, family and school/community. The key concept of school engagement is also very comprehensive in focus i.e. encompassing behavioural, affective and cognitive elements. The breadth of the research is therefore a limitation, in that it is difficult to focus on any one element of school engagement in detail and how different levels of protective factors might impact on each element. Future research could take any one of the three ecological levels and explore impact on any one of the three elements of school

engagement, using qualitative or mixed methods approaches. Future research may benefit from breaking down the multi-faceted construct of school engagement and focusing on specific components that are easier to operationalise e.g. a sense of belonging. Such research could involve larger numbers of participants, more sensitive tools to suit the level being focused on e.g. a greater repertoire of personal construct psychology methods and prolonged field engagement.

Ethical sensitivity, reflexivity and respondent validation would need to be at the forefront when designing a qualitative study with this population in the future. This needs to be underpinned by an understanding of LACYP as active agents in their lives, rather than passive respondents in a research study. Participatory research methods could therefore be drawn upon.

Lastly, future research in this area could employ a longitudinal design, to provide a rich picture of how LACYP's views on key protective factors that promote school engagement change over the school years. This is consistent with research that suggests the relative impact of different protective factors shifts over time.

4.7 Contribution to the research base

Although a small-scale qualitative study, it is hoped that the findings have contributed to a gap in the research identified in the thesis review (chapter one). This pertains to the views and experiences of school-aged LACYP regarding protective factors that promote their school engagement.

A strength of the study is the focus on hearing the voice of a small sample of school-aged LACYP, despite challenges gaining multiple and informed consent.

183

Such challenges may explain why there is a dearth of research on child views and a larger number of qualitative studies focusing on the views of older students in care and the retrospective views of care leavers, as demonstrated in the literature review. Wickenden and Kembhavi-Tam (2014), note that children's views often diverge from those of 'proxies' such as parents and professionals.

In a review of forty-four peer reviewed articles eliciting the perspectives and experiences of LACYP, Holland (2009) noted that there was a lack of space for CYP's individual constructs to be expressed, as opposed to the use of pre-defined rating scales. The current study aimed to provide a forum for a small sample of LACYP to express their personal constructs using active and creative PCP activities.

A second contribution of the study relates to an exploration of the protective factors that promote school engagement for LACYP at the individual level. Emphasis often seems to be on the family and school/community levels i.e. what adults and peers can do to nurture protective factors for LACYP and less so on what LACYP identify as being within their own control and agency, although it is acknowledged that there is no simple dichotomy between the two.

4.8 Personal Reflection

When undertaking research, it is important to reflect on the motivation that underpins it. Not only does this provide important context (Barker et al., 2002), it ensures there is an ethical thread running throughout the research. If motivation is not ethically driven, the whole research process is threatened. Of the seven common motivators outlined by Barker et al. (2002), 'desire for professional and social change', 'personal interest' and 'curiosity' were foremost.

184

As doctoral research is such a huge undertaking in terms of time and commitment, passion for the subject and professional contribution were paramount when considering possible research areas. I also knew I would have to take some pleasure from undertaking the research, to sustain motivation. I have always taken a special interest in looked after children and young people. This is reflected in sitting on adoption and fostering panels and working closely with the virtual school team to support LACYP, both directly and indirectly.

Working so closely with LACYP and the carers and professionals who support them has underscored the effects of adverse childhood experiences and trauma. Working with such complexity and oftentimes vulnerability can feel overwhelming and inhibit solution focused thinking. I have therefore found that the identification and bolstering of protective factors across the ecological levels has been a helpful focus in my professional role, introducing a preventative element and consideration of mitigating factors. However, I have always utilised research on protective factors for the general population and applied my theoretical knowledge to identify those which might take on especial significance for LACYP. The literature review and empirical study have provided a golden opportunity to conduct my own research into protective factors for LACYP, informed by LACYP, even if only on a small scale.

A major learning point has been the tension between conducting research for a target population and an acknowledgement that every child within that population differs from one another. LACYP will often share adverse backgrounds and possible trauma, but in all other respects are as heterogeneous as CYP in the non-looked after population. The complex interaction of protective factors at the different eco-systemic levels perhaps mirrors this diversity, which is why it can be

such a helpful framework. The focus on hearing the voice of LACYP was hoped to promote an understanding of the diversity of views and experiences of LACYP, to challenge the assumption of homogeneity (Hare & Bullock, 2006).

The research findings have helped me to re-conceptualise my EP role and identity as a researcher-practitioner. For example, when supporting LACYP I now consider a continuum of possible support informed by their voice and choice, rather than immediately defaulting to homogenous approaches and interventions based purely on psychological theory e.g. attachment.

My last reflection relates to conducting research in the context of COVID 19 and associated restrictions. Interviews had to take place via a secure remote platform, affecting the atmosphere and intimacy of the researcher-participant collaboration. Instead of sitting alongside children, I was effectively seated in a face-to-face position, which may have been a little overwhelming for some. However, the shared screen function provided a joint focus for attention, which was helpful.

Restrictions also affected the gaining of consent from social workers. It would usually be easy to approach the appropriate social worker, as they work in the same building. Vehicles for contact were reduced to email and phone call, which was a challenge at times.

Lastly, the context of COVID 19 undoubtedly affected some of the responses given by the LACYP interviewed, reminding me of the crucial influence of the social milieu inhabited by participants. For example, there seemed to be an increased emphasis on the role of the foster carer as co-educator and renewed appreciation of extra-curricular clubs, which were just beginning to re-open. The

children also seemed to reflect on difficulties retaining and recalling information taught previously. These reflections need to be considered when evaluating transferability of the research findings to a similar population who may inhabit a different social context.

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190

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Appendix 1 Risk and protective factors for CYP's mental health   (DfE, 2016)

Risk and protective factors for CYP's mental health

RISK FACTORS

Child
- ✘ Genetic influences
- ✘ Low IQ and learning disabilities
- ✘ Specific development delay
- ✘ Communication difficulties
- ✘ Difficult temperament
- ✘ Physical illness
- ✘ Academic failure
- ✘ Low self-esteem

Family
- ✘ Family disharmony, or break up
- ✘ Inconsistent discipline style
- ✘ Parent/s with mental illness or substance abuse
- ✘ Physical, sexual, neglect or emotional abuse
- ✘ Parental criminality or alcoholism
- ✘ Death and loss

School
- ✘ Bullying
- ✘ Discrimination
- ✘ Breakdown in or lack of positive friendships
- ✘ Deviant peer influences
- ✘ Peer pressure
- ✘ Poor pupil to teacher relationships

Community
- ✘ Socio-economic disadvantage
- ✘ Homelessness
- ✘ Disaster, accidents, war or other overwhelming events
- ✘ Discrimination
- ✘ Other significant life events
- ✘ Lack of access to support services

Child | Family | School | Community

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Child
- ✔ Secure attachment experience
- ✔ Good communication skills
- ✔ Having a belief in control
- ✔ A positive attitude
- ✔ Experiences of success and achievement
- ✔ Capacity to reflect

Family
- ✔ Family harmony and stability
- ✔ Supportive parenting
- ✔ Strong family values
- ✔ Affection
- ✔ Clear, consistent discipline
- ✔ Support for education

School
- ✔ Positive school climate that enhances belonging and connectedness
- ✔ Clear policies on behaviour and bullying
- ✔ 'Open door' policy for children to raise problems
- ✔ A whole-school approach to promoting good mental health

Community
- ✔ Wider supportive network
- ✔ Good housing
- ✔ High standard of living
- ✔ Opportunities for valued social roles
- ✔ Range of sport/leisure activities

Appendix 2 PRISMA flow diagram

Identification

| Records identified through database searching (n = 664) | Additional records identified through other sources (n = 2) |

↓ ↓

Records after duplicates removed (n = 353)

Screening

↓

| Records screened (n = 353) | → | Records excluded (n = 321) |

Eligibility

↓

| Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n = 32 + 1) | → | Full-text articles excluded, with reasons (n = 22) |

↓

Included

Studies included in qualitative review (n = 11)

Appendix 3 Mapping table

Study	Aims	Methods	Location	Sample size	Gender	Age range	Socio-economic status	Ethnicity
Dearden (2004)	Research questions included: Would CYP's accounts of what hindered and helped them reflect the themes in previous resilience research? How powerful might the voice of CiC be in highlighting the need for continuation or change in the services currently available.	Individual Interviews. Use of a schedule with prompts developed from a risk and protective factors framework taken from DfEE (2000). Timelines used to draw CYP's attention to key moments in their lives.	One local authority in England (not specified)	15	Not specified	13-19	Not specified but all had experience of living in local authority care	Not specified
Neal (2017)	What do former foster youth enrolled in university	Highly selective sample of university	California, USA	11	9 Female 2 Male	18-23	Not specified	5 Latino 2 African American 1 White

								1 Asian 2 African American/White
	identify as factors that supported or hindered their efforts to engage in education? To then identify which protective factors can be reproduced for the majority of foster youth.	students either in care or formerly in care. Anonymous surveys sent out via the registrar's office regarding academic resilience. Eleven participants then agreed to participate in interviews exploring their lived experience and perceptions. Data analysis method not mentioned.						
Berridge (2017)	To identify care and educational factors associated with the progress of	Interviews conducted with post-secondary pupils about	England: One London Borough, one urban	26	15 Females 11 Males	18 (all sat GCSEs in 2013)	Not specified	Not specified, but 25% of sample from an 'ethnic minority group.'

	children in care at key stage 4. To develop insights to develop professional practice that helps support young people and benefit their education.	their secondary school experience. Deductive and inductive approach used. Analysed by two researchers using a thematic approach (Berridge et al., 2015).	district and one shire county.					
Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2016)	An exploration of the facilitators of educational engagement and success for youth who are care experienced, highlighting the implications for trauma-informed practice,	Semi-structured interviews of youth with care experience enrolled in post-secondary education. Questions related to student's general	One small North-eastern state of the USA	10	4 Males 6 Females	18-22	Not specified	Not specified, but 90% 'Caucasian.'

	framed by risk and resiliency theory via the personal insights of youth in care.	educational experience, supports, barriers and challenges. Transcribed by a graduate research assistant and analysed by two researchers using Miles and Huberman, 1994 coding analysis							
Mendis et al. (2017)	To investigate the factors contributing to the educational success of women who have been in care and have a degree. To identify how the education of girls in the care	Qualitative study. Semi-structured Interviews using a narrative inquiry approach based on feminist principles. Purposeful	Australia 'several states'	18	18 Females	24-65 (At least 2 years care experience)	'Middle-High status tier of employment hierarchy'	Not specified	

208

	system might be enhanced.	sampling used – ex-care women with university degrees (advertiseme nt in a specialist magazine). Thematic Analysis used but steps not explained.						
Honey et al. (2011)	To explore the perceptions of LAC, their designated teachers and a sample of non-LAC regarding resilience. LAC were also asked to consider what messages they would like to give teachers about improving	The part of the qualitative study used for this investigation was based on an invitation for LAC to write messages for their teachers. These were analysed via Thematic	Wales	51	22 Male 29 Female	11 - 15	Not specified (All participant s live in local authority care)	Not specified

209

	school life – via an open-ended interview question.	Analysis. Themes were integrated across participants to identify shared themes.						
Tilbury et al. (2014)	To explore the behavioural, emotional and cognitive school engagement of young people in care compared with those not in care – to provide guidance on enhancing school engagement via suitable interventions.	Mixed Methods Study. Surveys results but for the purpose of my study, Interviews regarding experiences of school engagement. Of all surveyed pupils, all were invited to participate in an interview.	Queensland, Australia	65	22 Male 43 Female	14 – 18.2	Not specified (All participants live in local authority care)	Not specified

Hojer & Johansson (2012)	To explore educational pathways of young people who have been in public care as children. To explore which factors promote positive school engagement and success.	Qualitative study. Face to face interviews and follow-up telephone interviews. Self-selected sample. Data analysis process not discussed, only that analysed using the NVIVO software program.	Sweden	33	24 Female 9 Male	18 - 21	Not specified	Not specified
Martin & Jackson (2002)	To explore the views of high achieving care leavers regarding the best ways to enhance the educational experience of LAC.	Individual semi-structured interviews. Opportunistic sampling (Newspapers and Magazines) followed by application	UK, London based	38	12 Male 26 Female	Range not stated. Mean: 26	Not specified. (All participants had lived in local authority care) Majority hold a degree	55% White British 8% African Caribbean, 36% Asian or dual heritage

		of eligibility criteria.						
Hass et al. (2014)	An exploration of how youth in foster care account for their academic success, and what constituted turning-point experiences in their lives.	Semi-structured interviews – audio recorded. Questions reflected a model of resilience that sees Protective factors and risks at 3 levels – individual, family and community. Inductive data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994)	California, USA	19	15 Females 4 Males	Range not stated. Mean: 22	Not specified	13 'Caucasian' 4 African American 2 Asian
Clemens et al. (2017)	To explore Foster Care Youths' experiences as students in school and ascertain their	Focus Groups (4) using Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) – a	Colorado, USA	16	10 Females 6 Males	18-26	Not specified	9 'Multi-racial' 7 White

		constructivist approach to research design and data analysis.						
	recommendations for improving the educational experiences of children in foster care.							
Francis et al. (2021)	To facilitate the looked after child's voice and gather their views about their move from primary to secondary school by describing a therapeutic transition initiative for looked after children.	Three phases: Individual interviews x 2 pre- and post-secondary transition with a 'listening to LAC' conference in between – gathering LAC views also. Interviews last between 45 and 60 mins. Creative methods used e.g. vignettes	One Local Authority in UK – Leicester City Participants drawn from 32 schools.	36	61% Females 39% Males	Year 6 – 10-11	Not specified	69% White British, 14% White/Black Caribbean/African, 8% Asian, 3% Thai and South African, 3% other dual heritage and 3% Polish.

213

		and narrative approaches						

Weight of Evidence Framework – A

Criteria:

The following criteria to determine **WoE A (methodological quality)** are informed by two coding protocols designed to scrutinise qualitative studies in particular: Brantlinger et al. (2005) and the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP). Completion of both protocols for each study has enabled me to make a judgement as to whether dependability and credibility (Koch, 2006) are strong – using a 0-3 scoring system.   Where many quantitative studies use the concepts of reliability and validity as benchmarks for their rigour, Koch (2006) suggests that dependability and credibility are more relevant concepts for qualitative studies. Dependability refers to trustworthiness via thorough reporting of research design and data analysis. Credibility refers to the extent to which reported themes are reflective of participants' views e.g. by using member checking. The following criteria relate to credibility and dependability.

I have used the weight of evidence framework to give a detailed overview of the studies, rather than using it to discredit or discount studies, consistent with the epistemological stance taken in this review (constructionism).

Dependability

    A) A clear trail for the data analysis process is present

1) Trail not evident/sparse detail
2) Analysis tools identified and summarised
3) Breakdown of data analysis process with examples

    B) Findings/Themes are clearly derived from the data (thick description)

1) Few illustrative quotes provided and limited detail
2) Illustrative quotes provided as evidence for researcher's interpretations
3) Thick detailed description from original data. Contradictory data taken into account

    C) Verification strategies are used e.g. multiple analysts

1) No evidence of triangulation
2) More than one analyst, or other evidence of triangulation present
3) Detailed account of verification strategies e.g. multiple analysts used/expert panel

Credibility

D) A reflective stance is taken e.g. acknowledgement of possible bias

1) No evidence that researcher critically examined their own role and potential bias
2) Researcher/s acknowledged their theoretical position or relationship with participants and possible impact
3) Clear evidence of researcher reflexivity and potential influence on data collection and analysis

E) Consultation with participants e.g. via member checking/respondent validation
1) No evidence of consultation with participants on researcher interpretations via respondent validation
2) Evidence of some consultation with participants via prolonged engagement or checking understanding with participants
3) Evidence of participants reviewing and confirming accuracy of transcriptions or interpretations (1st or 2nd level member checks)

	A	B	C	D	E	Overall
Dearden (2004)	1	3	1	1	1	1.4
Neal (2017)	1	3	1	1	1	1.4
Berridge (2017)	2	2	2	2	1	1.8
Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2016)	3	1	2	1	1	1.6
Mendis et al. (2017)	2	2	1	2	1	1.6
Hojer & Johansson (2012)	1	3	1	2	2	1.8
Honey et al. (2011)	2	1	1	2	1	1.4
Tilbury et al. (2014)	2	3	1	2	1	1.8
Martin & Jackson (2002)	2	3	1	2	1	1.8
Hass et al. (2014)	3	2	2	3	1	2.2

Clemens et al. (2017)	3	3	3	3	3	3
Francis et al. (2021)	1	3	1	2	2	1.8

Where: Low = 1 – 1.6, Medium = 1.7 – 2.2, High = 2.3 - 3

Weight of Evidence Framework – B

Criteria:

A) Research design employs methods that explore LACYP voice in depth, to yield a rich picture e.g. creative or multiple methods to elicit voice, taking into account developmental stage and communication needs:

1. Design is not congruent with research aim of eliciting the voice of LACYP in depth e.g. use of questionnaires or written response only.
2. Design uses methods that explore LACYP voice using face to face rather than indirect methods e.g. focus groups or interviews.
3. Design uses creative or multiple methods to elicit voice, taking into account developmental stage and communication needs e.g. drawings as well as interview data.

B) Research design incorporates a form of follow-up/prolonged field engagement to gain a deeper understanding of LACYP's views on key protective factors that promote school engagement:

1. Design is a 'one off' interview/focus study/survey.
2. Design incorporates one follow-up component to explore child voice in more depth.
3. Design incorporates a face to face follow-up to explore child voice in more depth e.g. ongoing work via interviews.

C) Research design is sensitive to the particular needs of the LACYP population e.g. use of researchers with care experience and addressing the power imbalance:

1. No evidence that the design is sensitive to the particular needs of LACYP participants. Lack of ethical rigour.
2. Design incorporates at least one aspect that shows sensitivity to their LACYP participants e.g. piloting schedules with LACYP/clear process consent.

3. Design sensitive to particular needs of LACYP population e.g. use of researchers with care experience and addressing the power imbalance.

	A	B	C	Overall
Dearden (2004)	3	1	1	1.6
Neal (2017)	2	1	3	2
Berridge (2017)	3	1	3	2.3
Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2016)	2	1	1	1.3
Mendis et al. (2017)	3	1	2	2
Hojer & Johansson (2012)	2	2	1	1.6
Honey et al. (2011)	1	1	1	1
Tilbury et al. (2014)	2	1	2	1.6
Martin & Jackson (2002)	2	1	1	1.3
Hass et al. (2014)	2	1	2	1.6
Clemens et al. (2017)	2	3	2	2.3
Francis et al. (2021)	3	3	2	2.6

Where: Low = 1 – 1.4, Medium = 1.6 – 2.4, High = 2.6 - 3

Weight of Evidence Framework – C

Criteria:

A) Relevance and breadth of Study Aims (relating to key protective factors):

1. Study's main aim is broad in focus e.g. resilience is discussed in broad terms.
2. Protective factors are discussed but limited to one or two of the following levels: individual, family, school/community.

3. Protective Factors are explored from an eco-systemic perspective, incorporating all of the following levels: individual, family and school/community.

B) Degree of focus on the outcome related to the research question (school engagement):

1. The study's primary focus is on academic achievement, with few aspects of school engagement mentioned within this context.
2. The study has a focus on school engagement e.g. behavioural aspects such as attendance and participation.
3. The study encompasses the emotional as well as behavioural components of school engagement e.g. a sense of belonging and motivation.

C) Study has a comprehensive sample of LACYP, including school-aged children.

1. Study sample includes a specific group e.g. care leavers or 'high achievers' only.
2. Study sample includes a restricted sample of school-aged LACYP e.g. upper secondary school aged pupils.
3. Study has a comprehensive sample of LACYP, including school-aged children or younger LACYP.

	A	B	C	Overall
Dearden (2004)	3	2	3	2.6
Neal (2017)	3	2	1	2
Berridge (2017)	3	2	2	2.3
Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2016)	3	1	1	1.7
Mendis et al. (2017)	2	2	1	1.7
Hojer & Johansson (2012)	2	3	2	2.3
Honey et al. (2011)	2	2	3	2.3

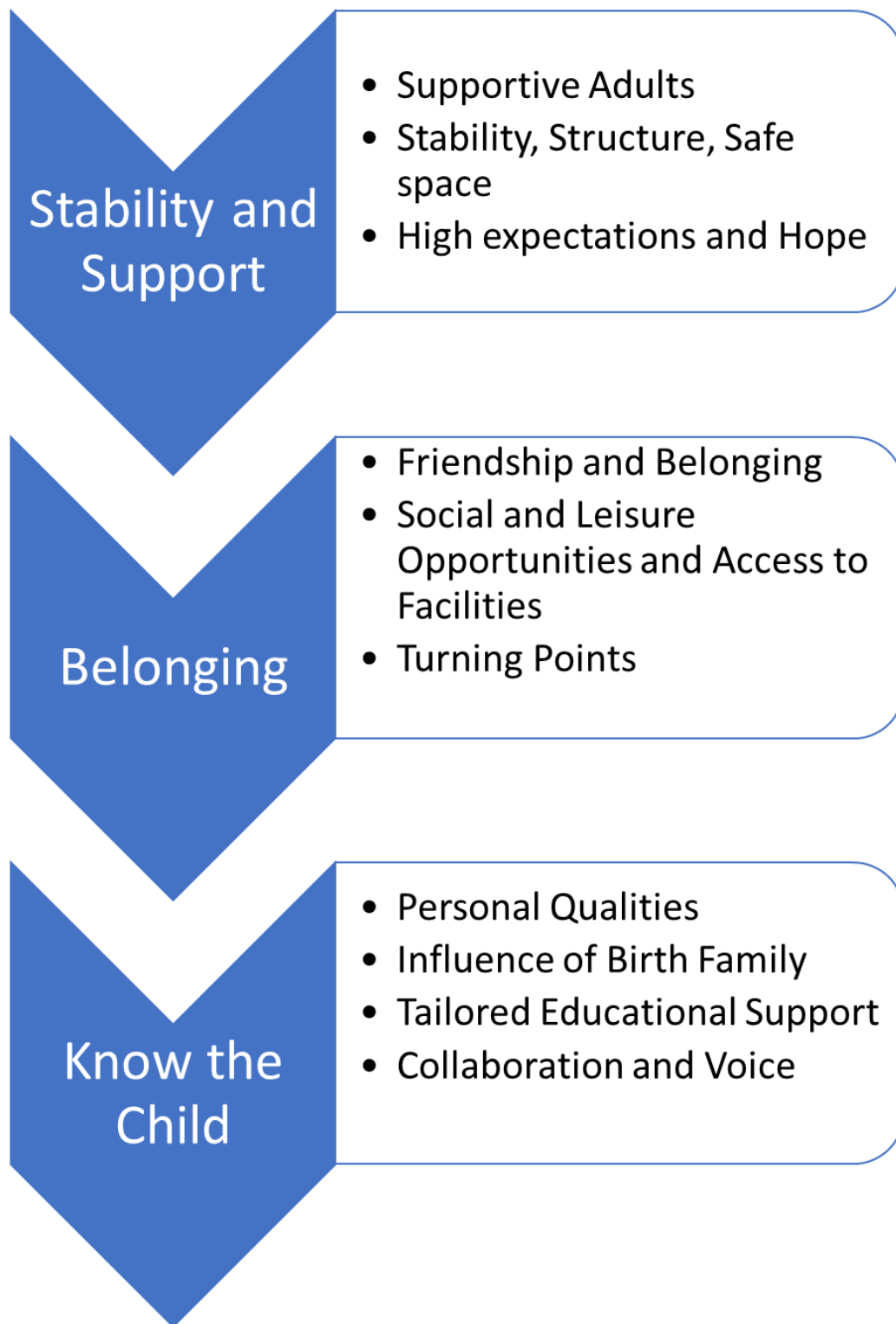|				
Tilbury et al. (2014)	2	3	2	2.3
Martin & Jackson (2002)	2	1	1	1.3
Hass et al. (2014)	3	2	1	2
Clemens et al. (2017)	2	2	1	1.7
Francis et al. (2021)	1	2	3	2

Where: Low = 1 – 1.6, Medium = 1.7 – 2.2, High = 2.3 - 3

Weight of Evidence Framework – D (Overall rating)

	WoE - A	WoE - B	WoE - C	WoE – D Descriptor
Dearden (2004)	1.4	1.6	2.6	*1.8 Medium*
Neal (2017)	1.4	2	2	*1.8 Medium*
Berridge (2017)	1.8	2.3	2.3	*2.1 Medium*
Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2016)	1.6	1.3	1.7	*1.5 Low*
Mendis et al. (2017)	1.6	2	1.7	*1.8 Medium*
Hojer & Johansson. (2012)	1.8	1.6	2.3	*1.9 Medium*
Honey et al. (2011)	1.4	1	2.3	*1.5 Low*
Tilbury et al. (2014)	1.8	1.6	2.3	*1.9 Medium*
Martin & Jackson (2002)	1.8	1.3	1.3	*1.4 Low*
Hass et al. (2014)	2.2	1.6	2	*1.9 Medium*
Clemens et al. (2017)	3	2.3	1.7	*2.3 High*
Francis et al. (2021)	1.8	2.6	2	*2.1 Medium*

Where: Low = 1 – 1.6, Medium = 1.7 – 2.2, High = 2.3 - 3

Appendix 5 Thematic map of abstract and descriptive themes from the literature review

Stability and Support
- Supportive Adults
- Stability, Structure, Safe space
- High expectations and Hope

Belonging
- Friendship and Belonging
- Social and Leisure Opportunities and Access to Facilities
- Turning Points

Know the Child
- Personal Qualities
- Influence of Birth Family
- Tailored Educational Support
- Collaboration and Voice

Appendix 6 Thematic synthesis table (from literature review)

	Supportive Adults	Stability, Structure, Safe Space	High Expectations and Hope	Friendship and Belonging	Social and Leisure Activities Facilities	Turning Points	Personal Qualities	Influence of Birth Family	Tailored Educational Support	Collaboration and Voice
Dearden, (2004)	●	●	●	●	●	●				●
Neal, (2017)	●	●	●	●	●		●	●		●
Berridge, (2017)	●	●	●	●		●		●	●	●
Strolin-Goltzman et al., (2016)	●	●	●	●						
Mendis et al., (2017)	●	●	●	●	●		●			
Hojer & Johansson, (2012)	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	
Honey et al, (2011)	●	●	●	●	●					
Tilbury et al, (2014)	●	●	●	●					●	●
Martin & Jackson(2002)	●	●	●	●	●				●	●
Hass et al., (2014)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●			
Clemens et al., (2017)	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●

222

Appendix 7 UCL REC approval letter

UCL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
OFFICE FOR THE VICE PROVOST RESEARCH

12th April 2021

Dr Gavin Morgan
Research Department of Clinical, Educational and Health Psychology
UCL

Cc: Linsey O'Connell

Dear Dr Morgan

Notification of Ethics Approval with Provisos
Project ID/Title: 20037/001: What do look after children and young people (LACYP) identify as the key protective factors that promote their school engagement at the individual, family and school/community levels?'

Further to your satisfactory responses to the Committee's comments, I am pleased to confirm in my capacity as Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee (REC) that your study has been ethically approved by the UCL REC until **12th April 2022.**

Ethical approval is subject to the following conditions:

Notification of Amendments to the Research
You must seek Chair's approval for proposed amendments (to include extensions to the duration of the project) to the research for which this approval has been given. Each research project is reviewed separately and if there are significant changes to the research protocol you should seek confirmation of continued ethical approval by completing an 'Amendment Approval Request Form'
http://ethics.grad.ucl.ac.uk/responsibilities.php

Adverse Event Reporting – Serious and Non-Serious
It is your responsibility to report to the Committee any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to participants or others. The Ethics Committee should be notified of all serious adverse events via the Ethics Committee Administrator (ethics@ucl.ac.uk) immediately the incident occurs. Where the adverse incident is unexpected and serious, the Joint Chairs will decide whether the study should be terminated pending the opinion of an independent expert. For non-serious adverse events the Joint Chairs of the Ethics Committee should again be notified via the Ethics Committee Administrator within ten days of the incident occurring and provide a full written report that should include any amendments to the participant information sheet and study protocol.

The Joint Chairs will confirm that the incident is non-serious and report to the Committee at the next meeting. The final view of the Committee will be communicated to you.

Appendix 8 Information sheet for social workers and carers

Information Sheet for Social Workers and Carers
UCL Research Ethics Committee Approval ID Number: 20037/001

Title of Study:
What do looked after children and young people (LACYP) identify as the key protective factors that promote their school engagement?
Department:
Research Department of Clinical, Health and Educational Psychology
Name and Contact Details of the Researcher(s):
Linsey O'Connell – ucjul00@ucl.ac.uk
Name and Contact Details of the Principal Researcher:
Dr Gavin Morgan – gavin.morgan@ucl.ac.uk

Invitation

My name is Linsey and I am a senior educational psychologist. I am also completing a doctorate at University College London (UCL). I would like to invite your child to take part in my doctoral research study.
The project will be exploring looked after children and young people's (LACYP) perspectives on the most important protective factors that help them engage in school i.e. participate more, feel a sense of belonging and feel motivated to learn.

Please take time to read this information carefully before you make up your mind about letting your child take part and contact me if you have any questions or concerns. If you are happy that you understand what taking part will involve for your child and you are happy for them to participate, then I will ask you to sign the consent form and will give you a copy of this information sheet to keep. Thank you for reading this.

If you do give your consent, your child will be given age-appropriate information about the research project and asked if they want to take part. They will also be asked to sign a consent form.
What is the project about?

Concern regarding the *risk* factors that affect the educational and broader life outcomes of LACYP is well documented. This research project seeks to find out more about key *protective* factors that promote school engagement for LACYP. School engagement is a key focus for LACYP, as it can mitigate some of the negative effects of risk factors such as trauma and instability. This project aims to hear the voice of school-aged children due to a gap in research in this area. Much of the research available explores the views of care leavers. It is important that the voice of younger LACYP is heard, in order to inform evidence-based approaches and strategies to promote their school engagement. Findings will help Educational Psychologists (EPs) support schools.

Why has my child been chosen?

The study is inviting six looked after children in years five to eight in X schools, to participate in two separate individual interviews using drawing techniques based on personal construct psychology (PCP) e.g. 'My Ideal School.' Due to the risk of COVID 19, the interviews will take place via a remote platform, MS Teams. This invitation is via the Virtual School X (VSK) team. VSK will help to identify children who fulfil this criteria and are likely to enjoy engaging in the project. The consent of both the child's social worker (with parental responsibility) and carer will be required for them to take part – in addition to their own informed consent.

Does my child have to take part?

It is completely up to you whether you decide to allow your child to take part or not. If you do not want them to take part, then that's absolutely fine. If you do decide that they can take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You can withdraw consent at any time without giving a reason. If you decide to withdraw consent, you will be asked what you wish to happen to the data your child has provided up to that point. All data from your child will be anonymised.

What will my child be asked to do?

After the informed consent of the social worker, carer and child have been given for the interviews, I will work with your child once and will talk to them about what factors help them to participate, feel a sense of belonging and feel motivated to learn at school. I will ask them to use drawing techniques such as 'My Ideal School' to help them express their views. This will probably take around one hour (they will be offered a break). All activities and discussion will take place via MS Teams, rather than face to face. Your child will then be taken back to their class. A key adult whom your child trusts will be present throughout.

Will my child be recorded?

I will need to record the interviews (for which I will seek your consent and the consent of each child on the consent forms). The recordings will be transcribed so that they can be analysed and themes identified. After the discussion has been transcribed and checked, the recording will be deleted. It will not be shared with anyone outside of the research project.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Your child will be taken out of the classroom to take part so may miss some lesson time and what the other children are doing. I will ask the teachers the best time for this to happen and fit in with that wherever possible.
I do not foresee any significant disadvantages or risks from your child taking part in the research project. Although the focus of the project is on positive protective factors that promote school engagement (rather than risk factors), there is a chance that a child will raise something that triggers an emotional response. If this does happen, I will terminate the interview, offer direct support in the first instance, inform a member of staff and signpost to a relevant organisation if required.

225

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

I hope that your child will enjoy drawing and discussing what helps them feel like they belong at school and what helps motivate them to learn. This will help EPs plan and deliver evidence-based support and advice to schools. It is hoped that this work will help shape and inform future research and practice.

What happens if I am unhappy about something?

If you are unhappy about any aspect of the project, then please speak to me in the first instance. You may also contact Dr Gavin Morgan (gavin.morgan @ucl.ac.uk) if you have a more significant complaint or feel that your concern has not been heard. If you still do not feel that your concern has been handled to your satisfaction, then you can contact the Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee (ethics@ucl.ac.uk).

Will any information gathered about my child be kept confidential?

I will not be storing or processing your child's data against their name, so outside of your child's school, no one will know who has taken part. I will only record your child's year group and gender. I will only collect their drawings with their consent. All of the information collected from your child will be kept strictly confidential (on a secure laptop). I will suggest that if any child is at all worried about what they have said then they should talk to an adult they trust. All of the data will be deleted once the overall project is completed (I expect this to be by Winter 2022). Data will be stored on a secure laptop with two factor authentication until this point.

Limits of confidentiality

Please note that confidentiality will be maintained as above, unless during conversation I hear anything which makes me worried that someone might be in danger of harm, in which case I have a duty to inform relevant agencies of this.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results of the project will be presented in a doctoral thesis in Winter 2023 and may be published. It will be accessible by other EPs within the Research Department of Clinical, Health and Educational Psychology and the main findings shared with VSK. However, no individual will be identifiable in any reports or publications. If you would like a summary of the research findings, please email me and I will provide you with one.

Data Protection Privacy Notice
In addition to the information above, we also need to let you know some specific information relating to our processing of your data for this project.

The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found in our 'general' privacy notice:

For participants in health and care research studies, click here

The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection legislation (GDPR and DPA 2018) is provided across both the 'local' and 'general' privacy notices.

The lawful basis that will be used to process your personal data is: 'Public task' for personal data.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk.

Contact for further information

If you have any questions about the research project, please contact Linsey O'Connell (linsey.oconnell@x.gov.uk) or Dr. Gavin Morgan (gavin.morgan@ucl.ac.uk). The information sheet is for you to keep. If you are happy to participate, please read and sign the consent form and return to me by email or hand.

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research study.

Appendix 9 Consent form

CONSENT FORM FOR SOCIAL WORKERS IN RESEARCH STUDIES

What do looked-after children and young people identify as the key protective factors that promote their school engagement?

Department:
Research Department of Clinical, Health and Educational Psychology
Name and Contact Details of the Researcher(s):
Linsey O'Connell – ucjul00@ucl.ac.uk
Name and Contact Details of the Principal Researcher:
Dr. Gavin Morgan – gavin.morgan@ucl.ac.uk
This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee: Project ID number: 20037/001

Thank you for considering allowing your child to take part in this research. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask me before you decide whether to allow them to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

- I confirm that I understand that by ticking each box below, I am consenting to this part of the study on behalf of my child.
- I understand that it will be assumed that unticked boxes mean that I DO NOT consent to that part of the evaluation.
- I understand that by not giving consent for any one element that my child may not be able to take part.

	Tick Box
I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet for the above study. I have had an opportunity to think about the information and what will be expected of my child. I have also had the opportunity to ask questions which I am happy have been answered.	
I understand that I will be able to withdraw my child's data up to 4 weeks after the interviews.	
I consent to my child participating in one interview/drawing activities to share their views about what helps them to participate in school, learn and feel a sense of belonging. I understand that information relating to gender and year group will be used for the purposes explained to me. I understand that according to data protection legislation, 'public task' will be the lawful basis for processing.	

228

Use of the information for this project only I understand that all personal information will remain confidential and that all efforts will be made to ensure my child cannot be identified. However, if during conversation the educational psychologist (Linsey O'Connell) hears anything which makes her worried that my child might be in danger of harm, I understand that she has a duty to inform relevant agencies of this. I understand that the data gathered in this study will be stored anonymously and securely. It will not be possible to identify my child in any publications.	
I understand that my information may be subject to review by responsible individuals from the University for monitoring and audit purposes.	
I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw consent for my child to take part at any time without giving a reason. I understand that if I decide to withdraw my child, any personal data provided up to that point will be deleted, unless I agree otherwise.	
I understand the potential risks of participating and the support that will be available to my child should they become distressed during/after participation.	
I understand that participation may help to shape and inform future research and policy.	
I understand that the data will not be made available to any commercial organisations but is solely the responsibility of the researcher undertaking the study.	
I understand that the information submitted will be presented within a doctoral thesis and may be published. I understand that if I wish to receive a summary, I can email the researcher.	
I confirm that I am happy for my child's views to be recorded (via MS Teams) and transcribed. I understand that once the transcription has been checked, the recording will be deleted.	
I am aware of who I should contact if I have any concerns or wish to lodge a complaint.	
I voluntarily agree to allow my child to take part in this study.	
I am aware that all data provided in this project will be deleted following project completion and only the analysis and transcripts will be kept. I understand that if I provide personal information (email and name) that this will only be used in arranging the focus group and then deleted.	

If you would like your contact details to be retained so that you can be contacted in the future by UCL researchers who would like to invite you to participate in follow up studies to this project, or in future studies of a similar nature, please tick the appropriate box below.

229

	Yes, I would be happy to be contacted in this way	
	No, I would not like to be contacted	

_____ _____   _____

Name of social worker/carer   Date   Signature

Letter for Head of School and Designated Teacher

Linsey.oconnell@x.gov.uk

07502276842

Dear Mr/Mrs…,

I am writing to tell you about a research project I am conducting in x schools and to ask for your help. I am a senior educational psychologist working for x Council, with a special interest in looked after children and factors that promote positive school engagement. I am currently undertaking a professional doctorate in Educational Psychology with UCL. VSK are assisting me in the identification of suitable children for this research project (looked after children in years 5 to 8).

The title of my research is: *What do looked after children and young people (LACYP) identify as the key protective factors that promote their school engagement?*

Following approval by the UCL Research Ethics Committee, potential participants for this research project have been selected, which comprise looked after children of either gender in the stipulated years, who attend a x school. A child who attends your school has been selected as a potential participant.

With your agreement, in terms 5 or 6, children will be invited individually for a one-hour session to engage in interviews with me that involve drawing. This will be at a time identified as least disruptive. Due to risks presented by the COVID 19 pandemic, this will take place via a remote platform – MS Teams, rather than face to face.

Children will be asked to draw and talk about their ideal school and asked about factors that help them participate in school more fully, feel a sense of belonging and an enjoyment of learning. These could be factors at the child, family, school or community level. The focus of the interviews will be positive, rather than exploring risk factors. Consent from the child, their social worker and agreement by carer will also be sought prior to involvement.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this request. Should you require any further information/clarification or would like to set up a meeting to discuss this further, please do contact me.

Yours Sincerely,

Linsey O'Connell

Appendix 11 Children's information sheet

<u>Children's Information Sheet</u>

What helps looked after children want to learn, feel a sense of belonging and feel motivated at school?

Invitation

My name is Linsey O'Connell. I work with children as an educational psychologist and I would like to invite you to take part in a research project.

Before you decide if you would like to take part, you need to understand why I am doing this and what I will be asking you to do.

Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

Take time to decide if you wish to take part; it's OK if you don't want to.

If you do wish to take part you will be given a consent form to sign.

Thank you for reading this.

What am I trying to do?

I want to find out what looked after children and young people think is important for them to feel like they want to learn, they belong at school and want to join in with activities. These could be things to do with you, things to do with family and things to do with school.

Why me?

You have been chosen to take part because you are a looked after child or young person and in either Years 5, 6, 7 or 8.
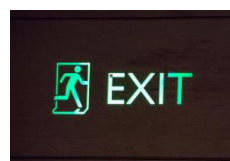
Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide if you wish to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep, and you will be asked to sign a consent form. (That is a form where you check and tick what you are happy about doing and then sign if you want to take part). You can change your mind at any time about taking part. You don't need to give a reason. If you do change your mind and decide not to take part you will be asked what you want to happen to any information that you have already shared.

What will I do if I take part?

If you decide to take part, I will work with you once, in either terms 5 or 6, using Microsoft Teams, so we see each other on the computer. I will ask you to do activities such as draw your ideal school and ask you your views. It will be me, you and an adult from school that you trust. You might miss your normal lesson, but I hope it will be fun. Our work together will last for about an hour. You can take a break at any time if you like and we will have a break in the middle.

Will I be recorded?
I will record our conversation so I don't forget anything important (as long as this is still ok with you). The recording will only be kept until I check the written record of what we have talked about. After that, I will delete the recording (get rid of it).

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?
You will be missing one of your normal lessons for an hour. We will be talking about things that help you, but if anything comes up that is upsetting, you can talk to me or an adult you trust afterwards.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
I hope that by taking part, your views will be listened to and people like me can find out what helps you to learn and enjoy school, so we can help teachers and carers to support you and other school-aged looked after children in the most helpful way.

What if something goes wrong?
If you are unhappy with any part of the project you can talk to your teacher, your carer or the person who checks my work at university. He is called Gavin and his email address is at the bottom of this form.

Will my taking part in this project be kept private?
All the information that you give through the interviews and activities will be kept strictly confidential. That means any information you give will be kept private and I will never use your name when I write up your views. I will only record your year group and gender, which cannot identify you. Only I will be listening to your interview recording.

If you tell me something that makes me concerned that you are not safe, I will need to tell a safe person in your school.

What will happen to the results of this study?
When I have finished this project, I will be writing it up to share with the university and schools, so that they can see how to help other school-aged looked after children feel comfortable at school and want to take part and learn. Your names and interviews will not be shared.

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for thinking about taking part

in this project. If there is anything you are not sure about, please ask me (Linsey O'Connell) or Gavin Morgan about it. Here are our email addresses:
Linsey.oconnell@x.gov.uk
Gavin.morgan@ucl.ac.uk

Appendix 12 Pupil infographic

What helps looked after children want to learn, enjoy and take part at school? – A research project

Who am I?

My name is Linsey and I work as an educational psychologist in Kent. I am also taking part in research with UCL university in London.

What is this project about and how can you help?

I want to find out what looked after children and young people think is important for them to feel like they want to learn, they belong at school want to join in with activities. These could be things to do with you as a individual, things to do with family and things to do with school.

What would I have to do?

If you decide to take part, I will work with you once, in either terms 5 or over MS Teams. I will ask you to do activities such as draw your ideal so and ask you your views. It will be me, you and an adult you trust. You might miss your normal lesson, but hope it might be fun. The meeting will last for about an hour. You can take a break whenever you like.

Will what I say be private or will other people know what I said?

Any information that I collect about you will be private. Nobody outsi project will know what you said or who took part. I will keep your information safe. I will keep a written record of what you have told m during the interviews and then later, after I have checked what is wri will destroy the recording.
If you tell me something that makes me concerned for your safety, I v to tell as safe person from your school.

Do I have to take part?

Not at all! If you don't want to take part just say. If you decide later tha don't want to take part, that's fine too. Just tell me or tell an adult you

CONSENT FORM FOR CHILDREN IN RESEARCH STUDIES

What do looked-after children and young people identify as the key protective factors that promote their school engagement?

Department:

Research Department of Clinical, Health and Educational Psychology

Name and Contact Details of the Researcher(s):

Linsey O'Connell – ucjul00@ucl.ac.uk

Name and Contact Details of the Principal Researcher:

Dr. Gavin Morgan – gavin.morgan@ucl.ac.uk

This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee: Project ID number: 20037/001

Thank you for considering taking part in this study. I have tried to explain the project fully to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions, please ask me before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep.

Please circle your answer to the questions below:

Have you read (or had read to you) the information sheet for children?	Yes	No
Have you had time to think about whether you want to take part in this project and ask any questions?	Yes	No
If you have asked questions, have you had them answered in a way you understand?	Yes	No
Are you happy to take part in an individual interview that includes drawing?	Yes	No
Do you understand that when you are asked questions about your drawings, if you are unsure it is fine not to reply and that you don't need to send your drawings to me if you don't want to?	Yes	No

Do you understand that all your information will remain confidential? This means no one will know who said what and no one will be able to identify you from anything that I write.	Yes	No
Do you understand that you can choose whether or not you want to take part? It's completely up to you. It is OK to stop taking part at any time.	Yes	No
Do you agree to the meeting being recorded using MS Teams? Do you understand that the recordings will be deleted as soon as I have checked that they have been typed up correctly?	Yes	No
Do you know that I will keep the records safely and securely?	Yes	No

If <u>**any**</u> answers are **'no'** or you **don't** want to take part, just tell me, but **don't** sign your name!
If you <u>**would**</u> like to take part, please write your name and today's date below.

Your name	**Signature**	**Date**

The researcher who explained this project to you needs to sign too

Researcher	**Signature**	**Date**

Appendix 14 Interview schedule

(Revised after Pilot Interview)

Before getting started:
Before the day of the interview, talk with the child's key adult (remotely), share the plan and schedule and provide guidance on MS Teams (a secure remote platform). Share how to gain informed consent using the information sheets and consent form (without undue pressure). Ask the key adult to find a private space, which ensures the child's confidentiality, with access to a computer.

On the day, before the interview begins test for any connectivity issues with the nominated adult.

Explain to the child that they can stop taking part at any time, without the need to give a reason. They can ask their key adult or me to stop.

Explain it will take about an hour to complete the activity, with a short break.

Explain to the child that they will be asked to make quick drawings or sketches (rather than detailed drawings) and reassure them that it doesn't matter if an error is made.

Drawings will be completed on plain paper, which they can hold up to the camera periodically (which can be photographed and sent via secure email).

Explain that I will make notes of what they are sharing, as their views are important - if ok with them (process consent). The session will be recorded (detailed on the consent form and also gained verbally) and so detailed notes are not required.

Explain that if children would prefer to respond verbally without drawing, that is fine too.

(NB. No strict order, as can visit different aspects as they become relevant/it is natural to follow on from a particular thought/topic – following the child's lead).

Warm up: Ask the child to complete the sentences…

- 'If I ruled the world I would…'
- 'Things that bug me are…'
- 'I am…'
- 'Something important to me is…'
- 'If I had a superpower it would be…'

Blob classroom technique (Share screen) – visual:

- Which one are you most like? Explore
- Which one would you most like to be? Explore
- Which one likes coming to school the most? Explore

I'd like to explore your Ideal School with you now. Are you happy to draw your Ideal School or would you prefer to talk to me about it without drawing, using your imagination?

Drawing the kind of school you would like to go to.

238

Part 1: Drawing the kind of school you would NOT like to go to.

1. The School
Think about the kind of school you would not like to go to. This is not a real school. Make a quick drawing of this school in the middle of this paper.

Tell me three things about this school. What kind of school is this?

2. The Classroom
Think about the sort of classroom you would not like to be in. Make a quick drawing of this classroom in the school.

Draw some of the things in this classroom.

3. The Children
Think about some of the children at the school you would not like to go to. Make a quick drawing of some of these children. What are the children doing? Tell me three things about these children.

4. The Adults
Think about some of the adults at the school you would not like to go to. Make a quick drawing of some of the adults. What are the adults doing? Tell me three things about these adults.

Part 2: Drawing the kind of school you would like to go to.

5. The School
Think about the kind of school you would like to go to. This is not a real school. Make a quick drawing of this school in the middle of this paper.

At your ideal school, what would make you want to come to school and not miss any days?

At your ideal school, what would make you want to learn more?

At your ideal school, would make you feel like you belong?

6. The Classroom
Think about the sort of classroom you would like to be in. Make a quick drawing of this classroom in this school.

Draw some of the things in this classroom.

Repeat questions above, but start: 'In your ideal classroom…'

7. The Children
Think about some of the children at the school you would like to go to. Make a quick drawing of some of these children. What are the children doing?

What kind of things would the children do or say that would make you want to come to school and not miss any days?

What kind of things would the children do or say that would make you want to learn more?

What kind of things would the children do or say that would make you feel like you belong?

8. The Adults
Think about some of the adults at the school you would like to go to. Make a quick drawing of some of these adults. What are the adults doing?

What kind of things would the adults do or say that would make you want to come to school and not miss any days?

What kind of things would the adults do or say that would make you want to learn more?

What kind of things would the adults do or say that would make you feel like you belong?

Salmon line Activity (Share screen for visual of salmon line):

Think of someone you know (without telling us who they are), who wants to come to school to learn. They don't need to be good at learning, but they like coming to school. What are they like? (Elicit core constructs and then help them to identify their polarity):

Construct   Opposite construct

 0 1 2 3 **4** 5 6 **7** 8 9 10

e.g. 'clever'   'struggle with learning'

Where are you now? Help the chid reflect that it could be different in different subjects or on different days etc. (Child labels)

What does … look like?

What could adults at school do to help you be more of a (notch it up by 2/3)?

What could you do to help you be more of a…?

What could family and friends do to help you be more of a…?

What made you choose X and not X (number)?

(Repeat for each construct and its polarity)

Additional questions:
Do you go to any clubs/activities in school or out of school? Tell me what you like about…
Prompts: How does that make you feel about yourself? How does that make you feel about school?

What kinds of things could family do and say to help a child want to come to school?

240

Tell me about a time you really enjoyed being at school. Describe what that day/time was like and what happened. What was it about that day/time that made you really enjoy being at school?

If time:

Magic wand: If you had a magic wand, what would be the one change you would make to school to make you want to come (even) more? It could be to do with adults, children or the building.

Appendix 15 Example transcript of interview (Year 7, female)

00:00:00.000 --> 00:00:01.450
Interviewer
Thank you, that's brilliant.

00:00:04.410 --> 00:00:05.990
Interviewer
Hello is that X?

00:00:06.280 --> 00:00:06.840
Participant
Yeah.

00:00:17.750 --> 00:00:27.150
Interviewer
Brilliant, that's great. For some reason teams is not very good, so every now and then it just freezes. Am I freezing or do I look like I'm moving OK?

00:00:28.970 --> 00:00:31.720
Interviewer
OK, that's brilliant. So X, my name is X, so please feel free to call me X, and you may be a bit, maybe a bit confused. Have you had a chance to talk to your teacher about what this is about, look at the forms and say whether you're OK to go ahead?

00:00:48.170 --> 00:00:48.710
Participant
Yeah.

00:00:49.020 --> 00:01:09.010
Interviewer
Yeah fantastic. OK so really it's around an opportunity for me to get your views on, I suppose what it is that you like about school, what makes you want to come to school and things that are in your ideal school. What school would be like in a perfect world?

It's important for you to know that we can stop at any time without giving a reason and we will take a break. We'll be together for about an hour.

So am I right in thinking that you're in year seven at the moment?

00:01:10.160 --> 00:01:10.710
Participant
Yeah.

00:01:11.610 --> 00:01:14.630
Interviewer
OK, and how have you been finding it so far?

00:01:15.220 --> 00:01:15.690
Participant
Good.

00:01:16.790 --> 00:01:22.380
Interviewer
OK, and you've been back since what the beginning of March or were you in through lockdown as well?

00:01:22.910 --> 00:01:24.720
Participant
I was in for lockdown as well.

00:01:25.050 --> 00:01:30.460
Interviewer
OK, brilliant. Do you? Do you want to ask me any questions about this before we go ahead?

00:01:31.180 --> 00:01:31.770
Participant
No.

00:01:32.200 --> 00:01:34.330
Interviewer
OK so just to let you know that I'm recording it, but as soon as I've written down the things that we're saying I delete it, only, I'm allowed to look at it. Your name and school is not mentioned at all, so it's purely anonymous. OK, so you can say whatever you want, all right?

00:01:51.840 --> 00:02:22.270
Interviewer
Do you like drawing X? (non-verbal shaking of head). Are you not particularly into drawing? That is fine 'cause some of the things I was going to say you could draw, but if you prefer to just talk, that's really good as well. I'm absolutely hopeless at drawing, so I would choose to talk instead too. So just to get to know you a little bit better. I've got a couple of sentence starters here, so I'm going to say the beginning of a sentence and then if it's OK, you can finish it off with whatever comes into your head, OK?

00:02:22.560 --> 00:02:27.370
Interviewer
So let's start with. 'If I ruled the world, I would…'

243

00:02:35.650 --> 00:02:36.370
Participant
But then I.

00:02:37.700 --> 00:02:38.590
Interviewer
Tricky.

00:02:46.180 --> 00:02:53.590
Interviewer
Can you think of one small thing? No, that's alright. Let's try different one. That's actually, it's a bit of a tricky one, 'Something that bugs me is…'

00:02:54.650 --> 00:02:57.440
Participant
When your siblings don't let you use their stuff.

Siblings sharing

00:02:59.100 --> 00:03:00.970
Interviewer
What kind of stuff are you thinking?

00:03:04.970 --> 00:03:07.640
Participant
Pens and pencils and that.

00:03:09.370 --> 00:03:10.790
Participant
Hair treatments and straighteners.

00:03:11.150 --> 00:03:16.690
Interviewer
Uh straightening is quite important, so tell me which siblings you've got.

00:03:18.030 --> 00:03:28.060
Participant
An I've got Joe, I've got Chloe, that's the ones I live with. And then I've got five more too.

00:03:30.550 --> 00:03:32.960
Interviewer
Wow, so you come from a big family, so it's good to have siblings share then and not so good when they don't share.

00:03:43.560 --> 00:03:44.210
Participant
Yeah.

00:03:49.020 --> 00:03:57.320
Interviewer
So let's think of another one. How about? 'Something important to me is…'

00:04:02.090 --> 00:04:03.020
Participant
My family.

Family important to me

00:04:04.000 --> 00:04:08.080
Interviewer
That's lovely. And what is it about family that's so important to you, X?

00:04:11.110 --> 00:04:15.190
Participant
That we all treated equally and I just love them.

Family treat us equally. Love

00:04:15.770 --> 00:04:21.470
Interviewer
Oh, that is really really nice and being treated equally, it's so important, isn't it?

00:04:21.940 --> 00:04:22.320
Participant
Yeah.

00:04:21.940 --> 00:04:29.450
Interviewer
So and what does it look like? Can you just give me an example of being treated equally?

00:04:30.540 --> 00:04:34.250
Participant
Well, we always have the same amount of, so that we get equally shared out like the same amount. And we all have same amount of space in the bedrooms and we have the same amount of pens and pencils.

Family treat us equally

00:05:05.520 --> 00:05:16.660
Interviewer
Yeah, that's really. They're really nice examples of being treated equally brilliant. OK, and then the last one of these sentence starters is 'If I had a superpower it would be…'

00:05:17.220 --> 00:05:18.330
Participant
Invisibility.

00:05:19.040 --> 00:05:22.020
Interviewer
So you were quick! Tell me why you would choose that one.

00:05:22.360 --> 00:05:36.230
Participant
Because you could go anywhere you like, and even if you could sneak onto a train or a plane for whenever you want and they would never know.

00:05:37.330 --> 00:05:41.380
Interviewer
So nobody would know you were there. What would you do?

00:05:44.270 --> 00:05:49.230
Participant
We could I could trick people and all kinds of stuff.

00:05:54.390 --> 00:05:56.840
Interviewer
Yeah, my imagination is going wild.

00:05:57.950 --> 00:06:17.710
Interviewer
Brilliant, that's great. So X, what I'm going to do now is I'm going to try and share my screen and hopefully what you're going to see are some funny looking blobby people. Alright, so tell me when you can see something a bit different, you can see some white blobs in a classroom.

00:06:17.980 --> 00:06:18.600
Participant
Yeah.

00:06:18.880 --> 00:06:32.700
Interviewer
Fantastic, that's great. So have a little look at the blobby picture and I want you to look at one that you think you're like the most. So which one are you most like out of all of those?

00:06:45.850 --> 00:06:46.370
Participant
Yeah.

00:06:47.710 --> 00:06:51.010
Interviewer
OK, can you describe to me whereabouts they are?

00:06:51.460 --> 00:06:58.610
Participant
There at the end of the table with friends around or people around.

00:06:59.300 --> 00:07:02.560
Interviewer
OK, and what are they doing?

00:07:03.370 --> 00:07:04.280
Participant
Yeah, yeah.

00:07:06.510 --> 00:07:09.100
Participant
Board games, it looks.

00:07:09.890 --> 00:07:14.130
Interviewer
Playing board games fantastic and tell me why you chose that one.

00:07:15.010 --> 00:07:17.900
Participant
Because I like playing all different games with my friends and people playing nicely.

Playing games with friends
Playing nicely

00:07:28.610 --> 00:07:33.430
Interviewer
Yeah, that's good. What kind of games do you like playing with your friends X?

00:07:35.180 --> 00:07:37.020
Participant
I like playing.

00:07:46.900 --> 00:07:51.910
Participant
If we're at the park, you can get to swing the fastest and sometimes we would play sometimes hide and seek if there's anywhere to hide.

00:08:03.780 --> 00:08:10.880
Participant
At school we just sit around like play, I spy sometimes.

00:08:13.720 --> 00:08:19.820
Interviewer
Yeah, that's quite fun, so do you have some of the same friends in school and out or are they different?

247

00:08:21.670 --> 00:08:23.340
Participant
The're pretty much the same.

00:08:23.690 --> 00:08:35.660
Interviewer
Oh, that's handy. That's really nice, brilliant, and out of all those blobs there, X, which one would you like to be the most? It might be the same one, but it might be a different one.

00:08:39.900 --> 00:08:42.390
Participant
Probably the one that's in charge.

00:08:43.970 --> 00:08:45.320
Interviewer
And which one is that?

00:08:46.160 --> 00:08:50.960
Participant
The one that's at the front of the class by the board with their hand up reading a book.

00:08:51.100 --> 00:08:56.900
Interviewer
Yeah, so why would you choose that one that you'd like to be the most?

00:08:57.900 --> 00:09:02.930
Participant
Probably because then you could be in charge of everyone and you get to do whatever you want.

Being in charge/do what you want

00:09:04.700 --> 00:09:07.990
Interviewer
And if so, you were in charge of a classroom. What kind of things would you do?

00:09:08.700 --> 00:09:09.810
Interviewer
If you could do what you wanted.

00:09:14.590 --> 00:09:30.740
Participant
Probably get up to all types of stuff like let them play like with their friends like 1/2 of the lesson and then the other half I would like let them crack on with their work and show them what to do with the work.

Mix of work and play

248

00:09:32.200 --> 00:09:46.870
Participant
Maybe like one day I could like teach the whole entire lesson and then the next week do like a quarter like game to run late to the lesson and then like 3/4 of the lesson to do the work in.

00:09:51.330 --> 00:10:01.840
Interviewer
So, do you prefer? Do you prefer X? E.g. Prefer it when most the lesson is spent with the teacher teaching you, or when you've got most the lesson getting on with the task, which do you prefer?

00:10:02.430 --> 00:10:10.540
Participant
Probably the one where the teacher is teaching most things and then you can understand a bit more of what to do and how to do it.

Like it when teacher explains

00:10:10.970 --> 00:10:15.050
Interviewer
Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. You explained that really, really well.

00:10:15.710 --> 00:10:21.860
Interviewer
So out of those now, can you choose one that you think likes coming to school the most?

00:10:22.880 --> 00:10:33.500
Participant
Probably the one that is staying in front of the teacher with a hand up and the one that's also probably sitting on the desk trying to crack on with their work.

00:10:34.240 --> 00:10:37.580
Interviewer
Yeah, and tell me why you've chosen those X.

00:10:38.650 --> 00:10:50.670
Participant
It looks like they're really interested in what the teacher is trying to say and the one that's sitting in front of the desk looks like they've always got a question and shows they wanna be in the lesson.

Want to learn

Always got a question

00:10:51.730 --> 00:11:02.900
Interviewer
Yeah, absolutely. So they they look like they're quite sort of interested in what's

going on around them. Yeah, thank you X, that's brilliant. Is there one that you would say doesn't like coming in?

00:11:03.490 --> 00:11:09.850
Participant
The one probably in the corner with their arms folded because they look like they're not really enjoying it.

00:11:11.490 --> 00:11:15.660
Interviewer
What kind of thing might have happened to them for them to be looking and feeling like that?

00:11:16.650 --> 00:11:29.110
Participant
Probably that the teacher sent the student into the corner and like told them not to speak and all that, but I think the reason they've obviously been put in the corner's because of their probably misbehaving or something.

00:11:29.420 --> 00:11:51.900
Interviewer
Ah, that makes a lot of sense. You thought about what's happened immediately before, and then you've gone even deeper and thought about maybe what they did for that to happen? OK, thank you, X, that's fantastic. So I'm going to stop sharing my screen now if I can do that. So hopefully any second you're going to see me again. Can you see me? OK again, X.

00:11:52.390 --> 00:11:52.820
Participant
Yeah.

00:11:53.390 --> 00:12:00.590
Interviewer
That's great, so at this point I said about maybe drawing, but I think we said at the beginning you prefer to talk. Is that OK?

00:12:01.020 --> 00:12:01.580
Participant
Yeah.

00:12:01.620 --> 00:12:16.850
Interviewer
OK, so I want you to think about your ideal school and what I mean by ideal is the best possible school, so it doesn't have to be real school. It could be a school in your imagination, OK, but that you would really like to go to.

00:12:17.500 --> 00:12:25.400
Interviewer
So what kind of things? If you were to draw, what kind of things can you think of that would be in your ideal school?

00:12:27.290 --> 00:12:37.450
Participant
Probably the most thing I would like in my ideal school is probably like a couple of classrooms for the different subjects.

00:12:38.020 --> 00:13:08.410
Participant
And then all different teachers like some that do math and English and some that does just maths and just English and you like switch different between different lessons and you have my most favourite lessons and that is English and sometimes PE, depends but I want to choose what ones to keep.

> Give me a choice of lessons

00:13:08.460 --> 00:13:38.780
Participant
I would choose English, maths, not that much of maths like probably like like 20 minutes of maths and then the rest of the day you get to like like for 45 minutes of break and an hour and a half of lunch and the food that they would have is most things like kids like like pizza, burgers, paninis, baguettes. And some fruit drinks.

00:13:44.030 --> 00:13:47.220
Participant
A place where they can eat outside and inside.

> Place to eat outside and in

00:13:51.100 --> 00:14:02.560
Interviewer
So I'd like to come back about the teachers in a minute. Are there any particular activities apart from normal subjects, that you would have in your ideal school?

00:14:08.880 --> 00:14:10.790
Participant
Probably.

00:14:18.450 --> 00:14:22.740
Participant
OK, well the kids are in charge in that lesson and teaching the teachers.

> Let kids teach teachers

00:14:27.700 --> 00:14:32.130
Interviewer
Oh, that sounds really interesting. Why would you like that to happen?

00:14:32.890 --> 00:14:53.670
Participant
And so then the teachers know a bit more about you and what you like doing, and then they can get that in their head. And then think for the next lesson onwards, and then when they get to that lesson, they know what you like, how you like it, and what to do during their lessons to make it fun.

Teachers get to know kids better

00:14:54.560 --> 00:15:04.910
Interviewer
X, I think that's amazing. 'cause does it sometimes feel like you know the teachers really well because they're always at the front, but it would be a good opportunity for them to get to know you better.

00:15:05.640 --> 00:15:08.830
Interviewer
I love that idea. That's absolutely brilliant. Thank you for that.

00:15:09.520 --> 00:15:16.690
Interviewer
And so at your ideal school, what would make you like to come in and not miss any days?

00:15:18.860 --> 00:15:45.930
Participant
Well, like I said earlier, when the teachers really understand the subject and things you like and make it fun, but being educational at the same time and also when you have your favourite subjects in that school and like at break lunch and probably in maths, you can use your phone. 'cause in math you can use your phone as a calculator 'cause sometimes you lose your calculator and then you can't go out the next till like a Saturday or Sunday to go get a new one. So you could do that.

Mix of work and play

00:16:06.360 --> 00:16:14.620
Interviewer
In your ideal school would make you feel like you really belong there? You feel welcome and belong there.

00:16:15.970 --> 00:16:25.100
Participant
When it is educational and fun at the same time, the thing that you would really like at the same time is that there's computers and all that to go on. Sometimes to make it fun like you could do online classes sometimes like where your teachers set stuff and tells you what

Technology is fun

to do at the start of their lesson and then some of the lesson you can like do all kinds of stuff you can go on. Like for example there's

00:16:52.530 --> 00:17:09.000
Participant
an app where you could go on for your English lesson lessons or reading lessons you can go on and can read books and for science, if you enjoy that your teacher can like get laptops up 'cause there's all kinds of stuff for science so you can like get on stuff like that.

Technology is a source of information

00:17:19.670 --> 00:17:27.340
Interviewer
And what is it about computers and technology in learning that you like? Why? Why do you like learning through that?

00:17:28.540 --> 00:17:43.090
Participant
Probably like less of that, because if you use too much laptop time, your eyes can hurt. But the thing that I like about that is because you know the technology sometimes gives you more, more knowledge and like you can get it inside your head, what every teachers telling you. Sometimes you would forget the next day. But if you've got a technology and you might wanna Google Docs or something, you can remember it.

Technology helps you remember

But if you're doing it in a book, you can sometimes also forget what you're writing the next day. If you've got a test and a different type of paper, but if you was allowed your books in the test, I think it would be easier for more people.

Books help you in tests if forgotten

00:18:16.360 --> 00:18:42.980
Participant
Because people can think I can look back on that. When I was doing it and so then also you can do at the same time you can think. Oh, if I forgotten that I could go back for a minute and then turn the page and see if I can understand it in a bit more detail. So if you wanna test on a laptop, I think it would be harder because some kids can cheat, but – and that's the worst thing about computers. If you're doing tests on them, but, uh, you can like put more detail on a Google Docs, and sometimes it's easier 'cause then you're not wasting as much pages.

00:19:00.140 --> 00:19:03.150
Participant
Because sometimes you can doodle sometimes in your book and draw and all that and that could take up some of your pages.

00:19:21.650 --> 00:19:22.420
Interviewer
OK.

00:19:23.380 --> 00:19:41.780
Interviewer
So you really thought in a lot of detail there about sort of what the pros and cons of doing work on a book is compared to doing it on something like Google Docs. That was really helpful. Tell me X. What are the kinds of things that maybe some of the adults in your school could do to make you feel welcome and feel like you belong at X Academy?

00:19:43.840 --> 00:19:47.530
Participant
I think they make me feel welcome because they are really nice.

00:19:49.760 --> 00:20:09.100
Participant
If you're like lonely they will like go to, uh, some kids and ask if they can join in and no one is left out. They treat you equally like they don't like favourite people and they don't have favourites.

Make sure no one is left out
No favourites

00:20:09.150 --> 00:20:27.910
Participant
And they understand if you don't understand the work 'cause they've probably gone through it before, like when they were at school, they didn't understand what the work was about, and they've also been like really helpful if you are nice to someone they can give you like for rewards like we have positive logs that we get and you could get them whatever lesson you have.

Understanding when you don't understand
Rewards given (being helpful)

00:20:53.510 --> 00:21:00.140
Interviewer
I see right? So that's it. Brilliant examples of the kind of things that adults do to make you welcome.

00:21:00.510 --> 00:21:12.350
Interviewer
I'm now thinking about your ideal class. We thought about the school and what kind of subjects there would be and the people in it. What would your ideal classroom look like, so that smaller space that you're in?

00:21:14.640 --> 00:21:28.000
Participant

I think it would be a little bit smaller than now and then like 20 people in a class. And, uh, like really colourful.

00:21:28.450 --> 00:21:58.640
Participant
And you have boards up to tell you what type of things you will be learning about, and you can also have like different like colour lights you can like. If you're having a really good lesson, you could turn it into green or something, but if you're getting really annoyed that the kids are not doing what they're meant to be doing, you could turn it to red and then they'll understand what the colours represent and that means that they will know what happens if you turn into that colour, so people

00:22:05.710 --> 00:22:06.690
Interviewer
Yeah.

00:22:07.640 --> 00:22:09.990
Participant
will think. 'Oh, so we should like knuckle down now get on with our work.'

00:22:17.860 --> 00:22:48.500
Interviewer
Gosh, that's such a good idea. I love that as a kind of invention that you could have a colour around you and people would be like 'we are getting on her nerves. Now we need to back off, and quieten down a little bit', you've explained that absolutely brilliantly. X, thank you so that would be your ideal classroom. Fantastic, so now I want you to think about some of the other children in your ideal school, in your ideal classroom and tell me the kinds of things that some of those children could do or say to make you want to come into school and not miss any days.

00:22:52.480 --> 00:23:20.450
Participant
People would say to the teacher, what type of things they wanna do for the next day and then like all the all the kids ideas they could put it into their head and think if they wanna do this then we could try and do that in one lesson and try and plan it for like the next week coming up or like the Friday like the Friday could be the fun day where kids get colouring in or what they like to do.

| Less pupils in the class |
| Colourful classroom |

| Visual timetable |
| Visual to show mood so others can change behaviour |

| Ask what pupils want to learn |
| Follow children's lead |

00:23:25.410 --> 00:23:39.550
Participant
So if the kids told each other what they wanted, they agreed on stuff and disagreed with stuff, then they all came to the teachers and told them what exactly they wanted, then they could tell the teacher and say what they wanted to do for the next, like fun day or something and then the teacher can think. Oh yeah, we could do that that day and that day.

Follow children's lead

00:23:56.150 --> 00:24:12.140
Interviewer
So again, it's a really nice example of where the teacher is actually listening to the pupils and what they would like. That's that sounds really important, so tell me what would the other kids in the school be like towards you, X? What would you like to see other children being like to you or young people?

00:24:13.580 --> 00:24:23.840
Participant
Probably nice, caring, thoughtful. So then they could think of what the teachers could be going through and if if they've had a really bad day or something they can like try and be nice to them and

Be caring
Thoughtful

caring to them so then they wouldn't think 'oh not this class again 'cause they really annoyed me yesterday'. The kids could think 'we annoyed him a little bit yesterday so we can try and be like more knowledgeable and stuff like that so then they can know what they're about to do in that lesson. So the day before you could tell them what you're going to do in that lesson, and they could think of what to do in that lesson. For example, if we were doing English and we tell them they're going to be doing a story tomorrow, they could think of what to write in their story. And like go home and research some stuff about that specific story they want to do.

Give time for pre-thinking/preparation

00:25:28.680 --> 00:25:37.590
Interviewer
That makes a lot of sense, doesn't it? I love that idea of sort of them knowing in advance what to do and then they're able to prepare for it, which would help the teacher too. That's excellent, X.

00:25:41.170 --> 00:25:48.760
Interviewer
I'm sorry you were saying about the children being nice. What does nice look like? How do you know if someone is being nice?

00:25:49.840 --> 00:25:56.790
Participant
So that like by kids giving pens out to each other if they forgot and stuff and if someone is not doing the right thing, they can go over to them and say 'you're not doing the right thing. You should do this' and if someone needed help or something you could go over there. And if the teacher got something wrong or they misspell something by mistake they could say also 'Sir or miss you spelt this wrong by accident.'

Share equipment
Help each other do the right thing

Being nice makes you want to do it more

00:26:35.790 --> 00:26:39.330
Participant
Uh, yeah, and they could also be ready for that next day and think of what they've done and think 'Oh yeah, I've done that today. That really made me happy' and all that. So they've done that. Then they'll go home and think 'tomorrow I'll be

Being nice makes you happy

even more nicer and be more happier.' And the kids that have been messing will not mess about by like not doing the right thing and they could be ready for the next day like.

00:27:18.450 --> 00:27:25.790
Participant
So they can put their like mistakes in the past and do it differently the next day.

00:27:26.290 --> 00:27:58.050
Interviewer
Yeah, that's amazing. So sometimes when you see other people doing the right thing, maybe it makes you reflect and think. Actually next day I think I'll start a new leaf and maybe try and do the right thing as well. Yeah, that's fantastic X. Thank you. So now I want to think a little bit more about the adults in your ideal school. It could be teachers, it could be TAs. It could be someone a special adult that you've got a relationship with at the school. Anyone - What are the kinds of things that the adults in your ideal school could do and say to make you want to come in and not miss any days?

00:27:59.470 --> 00:28:18.660
Participant
They could say that tomorrow's going to be a little bit of fun but a little bit more educational. So if the day before when they're telling the kids that it's going to be a little bit fun, they could. They might have done like some drawings. They can say tomorrow we are going to be doing a little bit more fun. Uh, so if it was like spellings, re-drawing the right spellings and the next day, it could be maybe uh, uh, less drawing but more of putting the spellings in your book. So then they know exactly how to do it, and you know exactly how they think it's spelled. And

257

then you would collect their books at the end. Maybe like of every month or something? So then you've got four weeks of work done and you can tell them how to do it next time and if there's something wrong you can say instead of this letter you should have put this letter.

00:29:48.830 --> 00:30:20.340
Interviewer
Right, yeah, got you. So there's some really good things that those adults could do and you thought about that in real detail, which is very helpful for me. Can you? I was just wondering if you've only been at X Academy for quite short amount of time. You'll be going into Year eight soon, but you missed a bit of year seven. Are there any adults in the school in particular that you feel closer to you or that you would go to if you had an issue? You don't have to give me names or anything, but are there any adults that you feel you could approach easier than others perhaps?

00:30:20.840 --> 00:30:21.480
Participant
Yeah.

00:30:21.950 --> 00:30:24.990
Interviewer
Yeah, so is that one? Or is that a couple?

00:30:25.950 --> 00:30:28.800
Participant
Um probably two.

00:30:29.170 --> 00:30:37.270
Interviewer
Yeah, tell me, so give me an example of why you might approach them. Why might you go to them?

00:30:37.720 --> 00:30:53.940
Participant
Um, probably because they help me in Year seven and uh, probably 'cause I know what they do and like they could help me and other people if they needed any help with anything.

Key adults help me
Knowing what key adults do

00:30:54.200 --> 00:31:06.780
Interviewer
Yeah, that's really helpful to know what it is about those two people, not what they look like. But could you describe it what they are like that makes them so easy to go to?

258

00:31:08.620 --> 00:31:31.230
Participant
Probably because they've helped other people, so you could just try and speak to them and they'll probably understand. And so one day you could like so a day you could spend like 30 minutes talking to them and uh, so then they understand what you've been going through and everything like why you're upset or something. And you could just speak to them and they'll understand really well and then.

Key adult is understanding
Time to talk with key adult

00:31:47.250 --> 00:31:55.730
Participant
Uh, I think that helps me and I could go and speak to them the next day or something.

00:31:55.850 --> 00:32:04.850
Interviewer
Yeah, yeah, that's fantastic. And are there any adults like one in particular? Maybe that you do any activities with and that you see regularly?

00:32:05.850 --> 00:32:06.810
Participant
Uh, yeah.

00:32:07.160 --> 00:32:11.700
Interviewer
Yeah, OK, and how often is that?

00:32:14.060 --> 00:32:17.130
Participant
Probably every month I think.

See key adult regularly

00:32:17.470 --> 00:32:19.850
Interviewer
And what might you do together?

00:32:21.570 --> 00:32:28.130
Participant
Just speak and talk about how everything has been going.

Talk about what's going on

00:32:28.410 --> 00:32:33.490
Interviewer
Yeah, so just kind of maybe have some quality time together to chat things through.

00:32:34.270 --> 00:32:48.650
Interviewer

Yeah, that's really good to have that, isn't it? Thank you so much. That is really helpful. Got another little activity for us to do. A couple more questions. Are you OK to carry on X or do you want a couple of minutes break? How do you feel?

00:32:49.640 --> 00:32:50.530
Participant
That's fine.

00:32:50.520 --> 00:32:56.990
Interviewer
That's great. OK X. I'm going to share my screen again.

00:32:52.090 --> 00:32:52.560
Participant
Yeah.

00:32:57.610 --> 00:33:01.190
Interviewer
Alright, and this time you're going to hopefully see…
Uh, here we go just it's like a line with a happy face and a sad face and numbers nought to ten in the middle. Can you see that alright?

00:33:13.020 --> 00:33:13.580
Participant
Yeah.

00:33:13.780 --> 00:33:36.250
Interviewer
Ah ha, OK, I just want to ask you to think of somebody, don't tell me their name. Don't tell me who they are, but think of another young person that you know who really loves coming to school to learn. They don't have to be particularly clever. They might be, but they don't have to be. But they just love coming to school to learn, OK?

00:33:37.180 --> 00:33:39.530
Interviewer
Can you think of somebody like that in your head?

00:33:40.090 --> 00:33:40.710
Participant
Yeah.

00:33:40.860 --> 00:33:48.070
Interviewer
Yeah, now again, I'm not bothered about what they look like, but can you give me some words that describe what they are like?

260

00:33:50.240 --> 00:33:50.710
Participant
Uh.

00:33:51.580 --> 00:34:11.350
Participant
A little bit clever and interested in their work. They will do what the teacher tells them and they are also very fun sometimes.

Do what they're told

00:34:17.150 --> 00:34:46.080
Interviewer
Brilliant gosh, you've given me so many brilliant descriptive words there that was so helpful. Let's take a couple of them. Let's take interested in their work. OK, 'cause that was one of the things that you described them as so under that happy face I'm just going to write 'interested in their work'. OK, can you think you can use more than one word? What might be a phrase or a couple of words to describe the opposite of someone who's interested in their work?

00:34:50.370 --> 00:34:51.390
Participant
Probably.

00:34:51.440 --> 00:34:52.190
Participant
Uh.

00:35:03.080 --> 00:35:06.000
Participant
Not interested in their work, uh?

00:35:07.550 --> 00:35:16.920
Participant
They like being bad, and they're not that clever.

00:35:17.860 --> 00:35:47.570
Interviewer
OK, that's enough. That's great. That's really, really helpful. Just a few there. Thank you. So OK, see I want you to look and you can see that under the 0 in this not very happy face I've got 'not interested in their work' and under the happy face I've got 'interested in their work' and I've got a scale where five is in the middle. OK so it could be that you're different on different days or in different subjects, but whereabouts on that line? What number do you think you are between? Not interested in your work and interested in your work - and it could be different.

00:35:51.510 --> 00:35:53.060
Participant
Probably seven.

00:35:54.020 --> 00:35:55.150
Interviewer
That's seven?

00:35:55.900 --> 00:36:04.390
Interviewer
Great, so I'm just going to highlight seven now. Do you think that that's all the time at school or would you say you're a different number in a different subject?

00:36:05.440 --> 00:36:10.330
Participant
Probably in one or two subjects, I'm probably like a four.

00:36:10.760 --> 00:36:14.880
Interviewer
OK, and what might those subjects be where you're more of a four?

00:36:15.780 --> 00:36:18.180
Participant
Probably maths and science 'cause I don't really enjoy them lessons.

00:36:25.170 --> 00:36:46.310
Interviewer
OK, yeah, that's fair enough, and there's always lessons that we don't enjoy as much as others. OK, so let's think about that for a second. Maybe maths and science. What could some of the adults do to notch you up? So instead of being a four you're more of a six, what could they do to help you be more of a 6 in Maths and science, so you're more interested in the work.

00:36:50.070 --> 00:37:03.490
Participant
Probably make it a little bit more fun because all we like, I don't think it's that much fun in them. Lessons like I don't really enjoy them lessons because like we only in maths, we mostly just do calculations and that type of stuff. And then I find that quite boring at times and sometimes I don't enjoy it because

Make lessons fun/less boring

Maths is boring

00:37:10.950 --> 00:37:11.590
Interviewer
Yeah.

00:37:20.810 --> 00:37:31.970
Participant
I find the work sometimes hard to get, but I think sometimes I feel like it's OK because we do like fractions, which I do get and I do quite enjoy a little bit and in science I enjoy it sometimes when, uh, like yesterday we done this thing where we were on the Chromebooks where one side was like.

Technology is fun

00:37:38.920 --> 00:37:39.230
Interviewer
Yeah.

00:37:52.960 --> 00:38:15.020
Participant
50KG and how do you make it equal with 100 KGS? Or where would you put it up? So we done that on on the chromebooks yesterday but sometimes like today we done like an experiment. So I found that quite fun. But sometimes when we're just writing and writing and writing, I don't find it that much fun.

Not too much writing

Learn by doing

00:38:15.320 --> 00:38:33.980
Interviewer
Yeah, that makes a lot of sense, so something that's maybe a bit more hands on and a bit more practical would make it more fun. You've described that really well. Now this might seem a bit of a funny question, but I've asked what could adults do to help notch you up from a four to six, what do you think you could do to make you a bit more interested in science and maths?

00:38:35.070 --> 00:38:38.660
Participant
Then probably like concentrate a little bit more.
Uh, try and try and do the work 'cause sometimes I sit there and just hardly do anything 'cause I don't get the work. I could ask for help like I did today. I asked for help 'cause I didn't get fractions but when I don't ask I don't think I get that much work done, so I think also what I could do I could like do a bit more work.

Concentrate more

Could ask for more help

00:39:12.440 --> 00:39:16.220
Participant
'cause I do do the work, but sometimes I get like.. I find it difficult. Like other questions, I don't ask so I don't get it so that I don't really do much work as I normally do in maths when I enjoy that lesson. And inside, I think what I could do is

Slow down, to give my brain a rest

probably try and write a little bit slower, so then my hands don't ache as much and so then my brain can have a bit of a rest and then get a bit more knowledge.

00:39:57.950 --> 00:40:17.430
Participant
An work, uh, written working. I think if I were a bit slower for a rest after my hands ache and then do a bit more faster, then I would probably get the writing done sometimes and if I asked for help in maths, science and English from the person next to me that would help aswell.

Ask friends for help

00:40:35.750 --> 00:40:59.410
Interviewer
My gosh, you've really reflected that. I'm very impressed. So looking there where we've got the not interested in their work and interested in their work and you could be a 4, you could be a 7 sometimes, tell me what is it that you think maybe your family could do to notch you up say from a 4 to a 6 or from a 7 to an 8. What could your family do to make you more interested in work?

00:41:02.160 --> 00:41:04.000
Participant
They could get me like an

00:41:09.550 --> 00:41:10.290
Participant
I don't know.

00:41:12.200 --> 00:41:16.180
Interviewer
What do they do already that helps you be interested in your school work?

00:41:17.570 --> 00:41:46.760
Participant
They do a lot. I did get given some books that for maths that I do sometimes and science that I look through so I think that would help me if I read a little bit more to that. So I think that's what they could do. They can like make me read a bit more of that and also they help me with my homework if I'm struggling but I don't get that too much of that at the minute 'cause of all this COVID.

Carers give extra books

I could read more

Carers help with homework

00:41:57.110 --> 00:42:01.040
Participant
They also help, uh.

00:42:02.550 --> 00:42:07.980
Participant
me, uh, do all kind of stuff like I have this thing for maths online so I take that as

well. So I do that. I've also before done this English thing online, but I could like, read and understand a bit more of English and they could help me with that.

00:42:51.190 --> 00:42:59.770
Interviewer
Yeah, that's that's fantastic. And those books are they? They're not just books the school give you they're books that your family have found to help you, is that right?

Carers help when I'm stuck

00:43:00.100 --> 00:43:04.800
Participant
Uh, yeah, actually when I got stuck.

00:43:01.420 --> 00:43:01.860
Interviewer
Yeah.

00:43:05.140 --> 00:43:36.460
Interviewer
Now fantastic, that has been incredibly helpful to me, so again, I'm going to stop sharing this screen and what I want you to do now is think about a memory for me. OK, so I want you to think about a time and it could have been a long time ago. It could have been in your old school or this school, but a time that you absolutely loved being at school. Maybe something happened, but a really good memory of a day or a time that you really loved being at school.

00:43:36.780 --> 00:43:38.500
Interviewer
Can you think of a memory like that?

00:43:40.320 --> 00:43:45.710
Participant
Probably when we were in my old school we uh.

00:43:47.100 --> 00:44:01.350
Participant
done diary entries about when about school, and I think I've done it in X as well, so I think that's also what I enjoyed about this school as well when we done diary entries about our first day and then at my old school I enjoyed the diary because we could make it up. So I think I think that's what I really enjoyed as well.

Creative writing (making things up)

00:44:16.990 --> 00:44:25.720
Interviewer
Right, so did you say you enjoyed being able to make things up or was it a diary entry about things that really happened? Which one was it?

265

00:44:26.550 --> 00:44:40.520
Participant
At this school it was about my first day of school but at my old school we could do it about anything, so I made it up and did what kids enjoyed in Primary.

00:45:02.440 --> 00:45:06.280
Interviewer
And what kind of stuff did you put down for that? What kids enjoyed in primary?

00:45:07.760 --> 00:45:22.090
Participant
I put down that they enjoyed making friends and friends can also go into their secondary school as well.

00:45:45.360 --> 00:45:52.680
Interviewer
Yeah, that's really nice. You enjoyed doing that diary entry activity in both of your schools. That's fantastic, OK?

00:45:52.890 --> 00:46:02.640
Interviewer
I'm going to ask you now, do you go to any clubs or activities either after school or outside of school?

00:46:03.510 --> 00:46:32.590
Participant
An I go I went to brownies and now I'm in guides but it's not really opened yet because of the COVID and I haven't joined any club 'cause there isn't any at this school yet because I don't think they're doing them until September or something. So I think when they when clubs open up here I think I would join some and when

00:46:33.240 --> 00:46:40.430
Participant
Guides opens, I think I'm gonna do that again as well.

00:46:40.880 --> 00:46:51.560
Interviewer
What is it about clubs, whether it be guides or another club that you like - you did in the past or that you're going to do in the future? What is it about clubs that you really enjoy?

00:46:52.370 --> 00:46:59.480
Participant
I think at guides I like it because you can do all kinds of things and you make friends there living around your area and uh, also you can do like camping and all

that, so I think that's what I enjoy about guides and I think at school I think clubs to go to is really good 'cause you can make a bit more friends and like still at school you've got like different people to hang around with.

Range of activities in Guides
Helps make friends locally
Clubs help you make more friends

00:47:33.800 --> 00:47:37.870
Interviewer
How does going to those types of clubs make you feel about yourself then?

00:47:38.890 --> 00:48:08.500
Participant
I feel like it helps me a bit because sometimes I just hang around with one group. I think it would be better if I hung around with one group a day and sometimes another and I I feel like with the guides I could like go out a bit more at home and then I can like enjoy myself outside.

00:48:08.660 --> 00:48:38.510
Participant
And at school, I think if I made a bit more friends like, I got plenty, but I think if I joined clubs I could like get to know more people in like different years and what they enjoy to do. And I think that would help my friend sometimes because they could make friends with them as well because they could have like only us so then we can have like a bigger friendship group and all that, and then we can all like hang around sometimes.

Clubs help make friends in different years/groups
My friends can make new friends too

00:48:47.270 --> 00:49:10.520
Interviewer
You know what you've explained that brilliantly, and in fact, I think you've answered one of the other questions I was going to ask you which is what Is it about going to those types of clubs that might help you out at school, but I think you've already told me that actually, like maybe the ability to make other friends more easily that you could do if you went, you know, going to those clubs helps you at school. Is there anything else about going to those clubs that helps you out at school?

00:49:13.100 --> 00:49:30.670
Participant
You can have like more confidence when you're talking out in front of people like a whole class and then you wouldn't think they're not gonna like what you're trying to say, but then it will help you because they would understand it and they

Knowing more people makes me more confident to talk in class

267

sometimes would think, 'Oh yeah, that's the person that we all made friends with, so it doesn't matter' so.

00:49:46.550 --> 00:49:47.740
Interviewer
That makes sense.

00:49:48.170 --> 00:50:10.820
Participant
I think because of, uh, as we all don't know each other, I think that's why everyone's like shy, not confident or going up by the front now because we don't know each other that well. So I think if we join groups um clubs, I think we would all get to know each other a bit more and we would be a bit more confident going up to the front.

00:50:15.410 --> 00:50:15.960
Interviewer
Yeah.

00:50:17.150 --> 00:50:46.920
Interviewer
I agree with you, and I think you've you've made that connection really well between you know clubs aren't just about what helps you outside of school, but they also can help you in school a lot as well, with your confidence in friendships, that's fantastic. So the last question now, because I know that the time's going now. So the last question I wanted to ask you is something called the Magic wand question and what it is X is. If you had a magic wand, what would be the change that you would make to your school to make you want to come even more and it could be to do with the building to do with the adults, the children, the subjects it could be to do with anything. What change would you make with your magic wand?

00:51:01.800 --> 00:51:08.300
Participant
I think bring back the phones and I think another thing is uh, to probably make people feel uh, like kind and comfortable about where they are and to make people feel pleasant and welcome to the school if there's new year sevens. I think it would be better to then if everyone welcomes them nicely and friendly and then they can make friends easily, 'cause like we could all like help them out, make friends and all that.

Welcome new pupils
Let us use our phones

00:51:53.830 --> 00:52:09.980
Interviewer
I think that's absolutely lovely and like basically treating them the way that you probably wanted to be treated when you started year seven. So you answered

268

that absolutely beautifully. Thank you so much for spending this time with me, X. How do you feel about it? Being Friday, you've got the weekend now.

00:52:11.690 --> 00:52:21.540
Participant
I'm quite happy it's actually the end of school and has been very interesting this week at school.

00:52:22.120 --> 00:52:29.500
Interviewer
That's good, so you had a good week, an interesting week, and now you're ready for your weekend. And is Mrs X still with you?

00:52:29.890 --> 00:52:30.510
Participant
Yeah.

00:52:38.650 --> 00:52:53.260
Interviewer
Yeah, thank you, just to say thank you so much for facilitating this. Thank you. It's been an absolute pleasure listening to X's views. She expresses herself really, really well, and it's been incredibly helpful for me. So thank you very much.

Key to codes

Sub-theme	Colour
Physical classroom environment and resources	
Teaching Practice that helps me	
Outdoor spaces	
Caring teachers	
Key adults	
Active carers	
Peer relationships	
Birth siblings	
School community and responsibility	
Developing skills via clubs	
Positive behaviours for learning	
Pro-social behaviours	

Each colour corresponds to the code's descriptive theme

269

Appendix 16 Thematic map

Supportive Learning Environment
- Physical classroom environment /resources
- Teaching Practice that helps me
- Outdoor Spaces

Caring Adults
- Caring Teachers
- Key Adults
- Active Carers

Belonging
- Peer Relationships
- Birth Siblings
- School Community and Responsibility

Skills for Life
- Positive behaviours for learning
- Things I can do to help me get along with others
- Developing Skills for Life

Appendix 17 Codes, descriptive themes and analytic themes

Abstract Theme	Descriptive Theme	Codes
A Supportive Learning Environment	Physical Classroom Environment and Resources	Technology helps you remember more Technology is fun (YouTube) (Apps and laptops) Technology is a source of information Sitting near window so I can check what's going on outside Calm quiet learning environment helps me concentrate (not noisy) Less pupils in the class Colourful classroom Visuals e.g. visual timetable Visual (traffic lights) to show mood so others can change behaviour
	Teaching Practice that helps me	Adults could start the writing off for me/ not too much writing Need help with writing – check it and guide me Creative writing (making things up) Both fun talk and talk to do with the subject Mix of work and play Make lessons more fun, less boring

		Help pupils learn through their interests e.g. sport
		Get pupils to teach others things they are good at (swap skills)
		I understand but forget easily e.g. tests (forgot lots in lockdown)
		Books help in tests if forgotten
		Give time for pre-thinking/preparation
		Let us use our phones
		Learn by doing
		Active learning is easier
		Like it when teacher explains
		Don't just tell/direct, explain
		Show me, don't just tell me (Modelling)
		Lots of practice helps build confidence
		Lots of examples are helpful
		Like help when I'm stuck
		Helping is checking in on me
		Extra support so I understand the work more
		TAs help you learn
		Help from friend before adult
		Rewards given
		Love creative/artistic subjects
		Like having time to think

	Outdoor Spaces	Playing outside/activities
		Play equipment
		Sports at school are important – Team sports
		Lots of school Trips Outside space for lunch
		Calm zone – outside
		Place to eat
Caring Adults	Caring Teachers	Teacher is kind/not strict/not shout
		No favourites
		Make sure no one is left out
		Teacher takes pupil to one side
		Understanding when you don't understand
		Teacher speaks to children when worried/comforts me
		Teacher helps you when you need it
		Teacher takes time out to explain/answers questions
		Teacher knows and understands your strengths and what you find hard
		Teacher boosts my confidence
		Teacher should be encouraging so we try more
		Notice when I'm being helpful
		Give praise for good work

		Teacher should settle the class down
		Teachers helped me see how important my time at school was
	Key Adults	Close to Key Adult
		Key adult is understanding
		Key adult makes sure I'm listened to in meetings and helps me understand stuff
		Knowing I can go to key adult and what they are able to do
		Having time to talk with key adult
		We talk about all that's been going on
		See the key adult regularly
		Nurture activities/space together
	Active Carers	Carer helps with/checks homework
		Family continue to teach at home/help me practice/Go over work when I was distracted at school
		Family pre-teach stuff
		Help me when I'm stuck
		Family signpost when stuck
		Carer tests me
		Family give extra work to prepare for secondary school
		Carers could make us read more at home

		Carers give extra books
		Carers give me routine and keep me organised
		Guidance with development of skills
		Carer teaches me strategies
		Mum watches me develop skills
		Amazing Carers/Family important to me
		Carers support
		Carer patient
		Outdoor activities with family are most important to me
		Family pets important to me
		Family/Carers treat us all equally (love)
Belonging	Peer relationships	Sit next to best friend
		Playing games with friends
		Playing nicely
		Be able to pick friends to work with and join 'nurture'
		Friends are kind/not mean and make me laugh/have fun without messing about
		Friends are supportive
		Share equipment
		Helping each other to 'do the right thing.'

		Friends protect you/stop fights
		Friends talk to you every day
		Friends make me not want to miss school
		Good memories of friends at Primary school
		Peers can help you learn things they are good at
		Friends give help when stuck, not just give the answer
		Ask friends for help
		Chatting is hard
		Being with unfamiliar kids is hard
		I don't always know what's going on (peers)
		Make new friends at new school
		A school with only the friends you already have/new people make me nervous
		New friends mean you lose old friends
		No bullying
		Have a buddy bus stop
		Feel I belong at school
		Belonging is teachers and friends I know and care about
		Want to stay at this school/same school for a long time helps

		Knowing people a long time helps me trust them
	Birth Siblings	Want school to be near siblings
		Like it when brother with me
		Not sure about siblings at same school (conflicted)
		Brother been excluded
		Siblings in my mind
		Having a sibling at school can be positive – gives me advice
		Sister as role model
		Siblings sharing
	School Community and Responsibility	Special clothing makes me special/states my role (same as teachers)
		Uniform/badge shows you represent your school
		House system gives me a sense of belonging
		Being picked for the school district team
		Welcome new pupils
		Dog makes me feel welcome
		Giving me responsibility improves my behaviour and I feel proud
		When I'm given responsibility it shows the teacher trusts me
		Ask us what we think

		Give a choice of lessons
		Ask what pupils want to learn (follow our lead)
		Let kids teach the teachers
		Teachers get to know kids better
Skills for Life	Developing Skills via Clubs	Outdoor clubs (out of school)
		Scouts gives life skills/prep for future – adulthood/Learning for life
		Range of activities in Guides
		Farming club
		Love animals, taking care of them
		Drama Therapy
		Everyone in same situation so can share
		Learn skills in clubs
		Clubs help me express myself
		Clubs make me feel confident
		Clubs are fun
		Clubs help me meet new people and make new friends (locally/in different year groups)
		Knowing new people gives more confidence to talk in class
		My friends can make new friends too
	Positive behaviours for learning	I need to think about the task more before doing it (more consideration)/not just go ahead and write without thinking

		Magpie ideas and combine with my own
		Use a strategy to remember things/look back at notes to remember things
		Re-read so I understand
		Revise
		Ask for help
		Check my work through
		Wanting to learn/Good attitude to work
		Try your best
		Slow down to give my brain a rest
		Basic skills before harder ones
		Practice skills lots/consistency/Practice step by step/Practice at home
		Concentrate more (even when I don't like the subject)
		Concentration leads to test success, leads to a career
		Use my interests to learn more
		Always got a question
		Get homework done so it's out of the way
		Good to enjoy reading/read more
		Being in charge/ Do what I want to do

		Better understanding means I enjoy it more
		Learning means I can get a job
	Pro-social behaviours	Be caring, don't just think of yourself
		Thoughtful
		Being nice makes me happy so I want to do it more
		Be kind, not rude
		Be respectful
		Mutual respect e.g. let people go first
		Do what family says, don't be rude
		Do what I'm told
		Importance of being yourself
		I'd like it if things didn't really bother me
		Need to say sorry/take responsibility
		Stand back and think about what's going on

Appendix 18 Children and young people's feedback form Lundy (2007)

Boy   **Girl**   **Other**   **I don't know**
Age

Tick the number of stars you would give to everything below. Five stars is the best.

SPACE   *   **   ***
****   *****

I was listened to from the start				
I felt comfortable giving my opinions				
I felt safe giving my opinions				

VOICE

I got the chance to give my opinions				
I got enough information to help me give my opinions				
I got support to have my voice heard				
I understood what was being discussed				
I could give my opinions whatever way I wanted				
I had enough time to talk				

AUDIENCE

I know who wants to hear my opinions					
I know why they want my opinions					
They were honest about what they would try to do					
with my opinions					

INFLUENCE

I know where my opinions are going next					
I know how I will be told about what happens to my opinions					
I think what I said today will be taken seriously					

Is there anything else that would have helped you in giving your opinions?

THANK YOU

Appendix 19: 15-point checklist of criteria for good thematic analysis process Braun and Clarke, (2013)

Transcription	1.	The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for 'accuracy'.
Coding	2.	Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process.
	3.	Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples (an anecdotal approach) but, instead, the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive.
	4.	All relevant extracts for all each theme have been collated.
	5.	Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set.
	6.	Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive.
Analysis	7.	Data have been analysed rather than just paraphrased or described.
	8.	Analysis and data match each other – the extracts illustrate the analytic claims.
	9.	Analysis tells a convincing and well-organised story about the data and topic.
	10.	A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided.
Overall	11.	Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately, without rushing a phase or giving it a once-over-lightly.
Written report	12.	The assumptions about ThA are clearly explicated.
	13.	There is a good fit between what you claim you do, and what you show you have done – ie, described method and reported analysis are consistent.
	14.	The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis.
	15.	The researcher is positioned as *active* in the research process; themes do not just 'emerge'.

(Braun & Clark, 2013)