

Using collaborative action research to support adoptive parents in their communications with school staff

A Thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the Degree of
Doctor of Educational Psychology [DEdPsy] in The Faculty of
Humanities

2016

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ABSTRACT

To address a gap in the empirical literature on Educational Psychology (EP) practice and on adoption, and to gain perspectives from the Local Authority (LA), this thesis describes collaborative action research conducted by an Educational Psychologist (EP) with adoptive parents to support their communications with school staff. Participants were members of an Adoption Support Group and colleagues in Social Care. Information was gathered via focus groups and semi-structured questionnaires to ascertain the types of difficulties expressed by adoptive parents and inform the processes of communication systems. Participatory action research empowered participants to engage in meaningful and purposeful actions of planning, designing and evaluating information. The research narrative reports on first person inquiry through personal reflection and learning. Second person inquiry was generated in the course of research interactions with participants and the data that emerged from their realities to inform practical learning in action. Third person inquiry moved towards thinking around explanations for issues and the generation of knowledge. Knowledge was developed about parents' perspectives on the barriers and enabling factors involved in their communications with school staff. The action research approach captured the potential of the insider position to generate rich data *in situ* while promoting a collaborative response to the social situation faced by the adopters when communicating with school staff. My insider position as researcher, holding multiple roles as an adoptive parent, as an EP and LA officer, is actively acknowledged as influencing understanding and the conceptualisations of the findings. The participants collaborated in the generation of a resource that provided opportunities for insight into issues to improve working practice and may provide a tool to allow parents to communicate effectively with school staff. The resource supported two main recognised functions: practical structure and emotional support. Empowering approaches were those that respected their knowledge, used their language and meanings in an emancipatory way that removed barriers, and were inclusive of them and their children. Communication is enhanced by and depends on systems that are empowering for parents and staff to co-construct shared understandings.

DECLARATION

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am obliged to the group of adoptive parents and social workers who generously collaborated with support and challenge in the research.

I am very grateful to Dr. Garry Squires who provided solid encouragement and critical support.

To my children. I am inspired by your love for learning about the world and your sense of justice.

To my husband. I appreciate your practical and emotional support.

I am indebted to my parents. My father who started working life at fourteen in the cotton mills of the north, later attending night school and gaining qualifications to train as a social worker. He introduced me to an Educational Psychologist with whom I discussed the profession. He died when I was just embarking on my first degree in psychology. He worked tirelessly for others, including in voluntary roles for young people. My mother worked hard to bring up her four children and taught me so much about parenting. She remained cheerful even throughout the painful years of dementia until her death in 2012. They lived their lives through strong morals, community action and Christian faith. To my siblings, in particular B. who studied for a degree later in life despite having epilepsy and ataxia, and maintains a positive outlook in life.

ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------|--|
| AAI | Adult attachment interview |
| ADHD | Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder |
| AfA | Achievement for All |
| ASG | Adoption Support Group |
| ASQ | Adoption Satisfaction Questionnaire |
| ASW | Adoption Social Worker |
| BAAF | British Association of Adoption and Fostering |
| BBC | British Broadcasting Corporation |
| BRIEF | Behaviour Rating Inventory of Executive Functions |
| DCSF | Department for Children, Schools and Families |
| DECP | Division of Educational and Child Psychology |
| DfE | Department for Education |
| DfEE | Department for Education and Employment |
| DfES | Department for Education and Skills |
| DoH | Department of Health |
| EHC | Education, Health and Care |
| EP | Educational Psychologist / Educational Psychology |
| EPS | Educational Psychology Service |
| FSW | Family's Social worker |
| IWM | Internal Working Model |
| LA | Local Authority |
| LAC | Looked after children |
| NICE | National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. |
| PEP | Personal Education Plan |
| PEP | Principal Educational Psychologists |
| PP+ | Pupil Premium plus |
| SEN | Special educational needs |
| SDQ | Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire |
| SSD | Social Services Departments |
| SW | Social Workers |
| VSH | Virtual School Headteacher |

PREFACE

Graduate and post-graduate qualifications

| | | | |
|-----------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1984-1988 | BSc (Hons) Psychology | Class 2: i | Hull University |
| 1986-1987 | PGCE | [integrated into the above degree]. | Hull University |
| 1992-1993 | Managing Schools Certificate | - Distinction. | Open University |
| 1994-1998 | M.Sc. (Education Management) | | Manchester Metropolitan University |
| 1996-1997 | M.Sc. (Educational Psychology) | | Sheffield University |

Summaries of previous research papers submitted in part fulfilment for this degree of Doctor of Educational Psychology

RESEARCH PAPER: The development, implementation and evaluation of a project on anti-bullying practice in schools

The primary aim in developing and implementing this project was to improve anti-bullying practice in schools. The need was identified through general daily activities of EPs. The literature and media further emphasise the importance of the area of bullying. The advent of Local Education Authority (LEA) inspection procedures and Government documents have stressed issues of organisational development and service responses to school improvement and have presented both a challenge and an opportunity to raise the profile of the EPS. A further purpose of the project was to seek to raise the profile of the EPS in school improvement and 'systems' work and thus widen the perceived role of EPS. There is a need for collaborative work between schools and EPSs to encourage the wider role for EP.s to be assimilated into common practice. The project stresses the need for the strategic application of psychology in LEAs: highlighting the importance of the area of bullying, the varied role of the EPS in tackling the issue of bullying and feeding back the findings and implications of these two key strands at different levels of the LEA system. The participants totalled 25 and included mainscale teachers, middle leaders, deputy headteachers, headteachers, Education Welfare Officers, School-Community Liaison Officers, Children's Society Officers, and Community Police Officers. The sessions included: individual learning tasks, information-giving lectures, role-playing, skills practice and other exercises, micro-teaching, brainstorming, case study, critical incidents, discussion, evaluation and reflection. The literature on bullying was studied, in particular, the accounts of the large-scale survey of bullying and interventions carried out over the period 1991-1993 at Sheffield University which resulted in Department for Education guidelines to schools. Information packs were developed from the literature and video and multimedia materials supplemented the resources used. The project covered the main aspects of anti-bullying practice in the first set of sessions and thereafter allow for a period of action, evaluation and reflection in addition to more detailed coverage of the priority areas raised by the participants in the later sessions. The project avoided the 'one-shot' workshop (Fullan, 1992, p. 75) by focusing pressure project approach.

RESEARCH PAPER: LITERATURE REVIEW: Outcomes of Adopted Children: a systematic review of the literature

The aim of this review was to explore the extent of research-based knowledge regarding outcomes for children adopted from LA care. The changing social and political context of adoptions is supported with statistical information and it is argued that the changed adoptive population requires an educational perspective. The research background is explored in relation to outcome measures of adopted children. Studies are clustered within areas of education, learning, attachment, and emotional and behavioural problems and are further informed by advances in neurodevelopmental psychology. The incidence of special educational needs (SEN) in adoptees was determined greater than population norms. Some studies found that adopted children's emotional and behavioural outcomes were similar to those in stable foster care. Behaviour issues, such as overactivity, emerged as particular risk factors in the studies. The findings highlighted the need for awareness and understanding in schools about the implications of adoption on education and the need for more effective information sharing and collaborative working practices among different professionals, families and children. EPs have a distinctive knowledge and skills base for understanding the needs of adoptive children and are well placed to work proactively within Children's Services to promote improvements in outcomes for adopted children.

RESEARCH PAPER: Adoptive Parents' Views of Communication with School Staff

Children, for whom adoptive families are being sought, are vulnerable due to experiences both within their birth families and due to time in care prior to the adoption process. Adverse experiences can affect psychological well-being, learning and behaviour with difficulties manifest within the interrelating environments of home and school. A review of the literature suggests that the incidence of special educational needs in adopted children is greater than population norms. To address a gap in the empirical literature on EP practice and adoption, and to gain perspectives within the LA and EPS, this project reports on a focus group exploring the views of adoptive parents on education and their interactions with school staff. Issues of 'mutual understanding', 'being listened to', and 'trust' were evident within a theme of 'parents working in partnership' with school staff. Parental roles of knowledge 'expert' and 'protector' of adopted children emerged from the analysis. Adoption awareness in schools was considered to be a particular area of concern. To conclude, the research findings highlight a need for awareness and understanding in school staff about the implications of adoption on education and the need for more effective information sharing and collaborative working practices among professionals and adoptive families.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Rationale for the Thesis

This section introduces and provides the rationale for the thesis. Key political reforms and the recent Government adoption agenda have drawn attention to the context for children adopted from care and have posed statutory duties for Local Authorities. Educational perspectives on adoption are in their early, yet developing stages. It is argued that Educational Psychologists, holding a comprehensive view of the whole child within the context of school, family, services and community, are ideally placed to approach this topic. An action research project was designed to focus on and explore communication between adoptive parents and school staff. A strong subjective position informs the thesis. As an adoptive parent and educational psychologist, I am in a unique 'insider researcher' position to have access to education and social care systems and the perspectives of adoptive parents.

1.1 Rationale for the research

The poor educational progress and well-being outcomes of looked after children are priority concerns for education, health and social care services (Department for Education [DfE], 2013a). Research suggests that children adopted from care present with more complex situations than were previously recognised (Cairns, 2010, p. 124; Golding, 2010, p. 579). The number of looked after children placed for adoption is at its highest point since the start of the specific data collection in 1992. There were over 5000 looked after children adopted during the year ending 31 March 2014 [an increase of 58% from 2010] with 92% children adopted from care due to abuse, neglect and family dysfunction (Department for Education, 2014ab). Research is advancing to explain the potentially complex profile of children adopted from care (McCrory, De Brito & Viding, 2010 and Rushton, 2010). Rushton (2003, p. 23) stresses that problems with school life assume greater importance for this cohort as the children move through the education system. Adoption legislation and guidance has increased in recent years, for example as evidenced by the significant step in positioning children adopted from care as high priorities in school admissions (DfE, 2014,c). Yet, historically, there have been few links between adoption services and education (SSI, 2000a, p.6). Local and national health service commissioners are encouraged to consider adopted children's needs when developing integrated services for vulnerable groups, including education services and CAMHS (Timpson, 2014). Primary Care Trusts [PCTs] as commissioners of services have statutory duties, under the Children Act 1989, Children and Adoption Act 2002 and Children Act 2004, to comply with requests from LAs to help provide support and services to children in need. The Mandate to the NHS Commissioning Board Department of Health (2013, p. 20) states that the NHS will be expected to work together with schools and children's social services to support and safeguard vulnerable, looked-after and adopted children, through a more joined-up approach to addressing their needs. Adoption is included in the statutory Joint Strategic Needs Assessments [JSNA] and Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies [JHWS] guidance. This affirms the timeliness of this thesis proposal to further explore the issues around children adopted from care, brought by

increases in adoptions, by the spotlight arising from legislative changes and by the demands for knowledge and involvement brought upon services including education.

Measuring outcome is challenging, with few studies and varied indicators. Lyons (2010) reviewed the literature of outcomes of adopted children which indicated that children who have spent time in the care system have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) above population norms. In their study, Selwyn, Sturgess, Quinton, and Baxter (2006, p. 250) reported that by the time an 'adoption in best interests' legal decision was made, 95% of the 130 children had at least one special need (health, learning, developmental, social or emotional); 50% had four or more. At follow-up 47% had problems in three or more areas (p. 204-220). Similar figures are detailed by other outcome studies (e.g. Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Lansdown, Burnell & Allen, 2007; Rees & Selwyn, 2009; Selwyn et al., 2006; Smith, Howard & Monroe, 2000). Complexity of needs is stated as one of the primary reasons for delays in cases being presented before adoption panels (SSI, 2000b, p.43, 50, 54). Consistent with this rationale and the recommendations of the literature review of 'Outcomes of Adopted Children' (Lyons, 2010), some sectors of education are becoming 'adoption sensitive', seeking the views of adoptive parents (Phillips, 2007, p.37). The stability which school offers can be formative and success at school can predicate success after education. The opportunities to develop relationships with teachers and with other children may not come easily without further understanding of the likely underlying causes of and possible responses to their difficulties (Dann, 2011, p. 457). Schools have staff trained in safeguarding issues and recognising signs of abuse and/or neglect; what is less well known or documented in schools is how to help these children in their future lives and learning (p. 457).

A reduction in adoption placement 'disruption' or breakdown is a crude indicator of success, but one which should be a key consideration for children's services given the increases in adoption noted above. In the case of a disruption, children are returned to care [under Section 20 of the Adoption and Children Act, DfE, 2002] with adopters retaining parental responsibility. Work continues to progress in establishing the rates and causes of adoption and additional disruption figures. Disruptions to adoption occur in approximately 3.2% to 20% placements depending on the composition of the sample and rising with age (Rushton, 2003, Rushton & Dance, 2004, Rushton, Mayes, Dance & Quinton, 2003; Hansard, House of Commons, 2010; Selwyn, Meakings & Wijedasa, 2015). Research indicates that emotional and behavioural difficulties are associated with a greater risk of adoption 'disruption', i.e. breakdown (Beek, 1999, p. 17). Parental feelings of efficacy, blame and power imbalances are associated with the complex agenda of behaviour problems Roffey (2004, p. 105) and Lyons (2011, p. 42, 48) and may contribute to barriers in communication between parents and school staff. The research area is justified from an interest to further explore these issues and the communication processes therein. These factors provide impetus that compels consideration of the context of the adopted child in school.

Post adoption support is documented through the Action Plan for Adoption (DfE, 2012, 2013) and the Adoption Support Fund (DfE, 2014d, p. 14) to be introduced in May 2015. However, these emphasise the rights of adoptive parents to *request support* of their local providers, to *request an assessment* not the right to support *per se*. Local authorities are required by law to make arrangements for providing support to adoptive families and to conduct an assessment of what

support each adoptive family needs, but how much support they provide is up to them (DfE, 2012, p. 34). The Working Group proposed 'adoption passports' – 'transparent guarantees' of the minimum support that adoptive families will receive (p.33) which are yet to be realised. To meet anticipated levels of demand, the DfE, (2011a) proposes that the use of 'adopters from a voluntary adoption agency ... will yield savings for the local authority' (p.2).

Establishing and maintaining effective partnerships across education, health and care and with parents and children and young people [CYP] is embedded within the Code of Practice for SEND (DfE, 2014d). Working with groups of parents or carers can be an efficient use of resources, providing support and giving them opportunities to learn and support one another and enabling understanding, feelings of confidence to cope with and manage the children in their care (Golding & Picken, 2004, p. 34). Parents are to be viewed as equal and powerful partners alongside service providers. Yet, it is reported that adoptive families wait too long before requesting help from services (Rushton, 2003, p. 29). Does this link with the aforementioned themes of power imbalance and self-efficacy? 'Normalising' the need for post-adoption support could lead to a greater continuity of care and provision (Holmes, McDermid and Lushey, 2013, p. 24). Lack of communication between adopters and support services when times are tough, heightens the risk to children when placements breakdown. If we consider the age range of children at the point of adoption, 74% are between one year and four years of age with 21% aged between five and nine years (DfE, 2014g, E1). These groups are within the pre-school and primary years. To gain further knowledge about what may contribute to sustained involvement with services and knowledge about preferences for provision is proposed with this thesis. Services that are listening to one another in addition to their client groups.

This study follows the research by Lyons (2011) which provided a descriptive analysis of how a focus group of adoptive parents viewed their interactions with school staff. The participants identified a 'wish list' for a resource or guidance around information sharing. The anticipated outcome of the research was its contribution to support communication processes and enhance collaborative working practice between adoptive parents and school staff.

1.1.1 The contribution of the Educational Psychologist

Within the present context of the commissioning of LA services, there are concerns among professionals regarding the sustainability, transparency and integrity of policy and provision for children adopted from care. A review of LAs identified a need for education personnel to improve their understanding of adoption and further develop inter-disciplinary practice. (Rushton & Dance (2000, p. 118). Sources of pressures for change are found within the organisation of the EPS. The DECP (2006) argues for:

[a] designated EP [to] provide advice on the design and management of projects to improve outcomes for looked after/adopted children. She/he can contribute knowledge of a variety of research designs and methods of statistical analysis available for applied research, which can assist such projects.

Research findings [Adoption UK (2014); Cooper & Johnson (2007); Lyons (2011)] highlight the need for awareness and understanding in schools about the implications of adoption on education and the need for more effective information sharing and collaborative working practices among different professionals, families and children. There is a need to recognise the needs of adopted children and the challenges they present to their families and professionals. LAs have a duty (and, therefore, EPSs) to understand and recognise the needs of adoptive families and to support the well-being and development of adopted children. Given the experience, knowledge and practice base of EPs, they are well-placed to support adoptive families and work together with other services for children.

Government policy is geared to reducing the number of looked after children and increasing the numbers of children placed for adoption. There is more and more overlap between these groups. Adopted children can be less visible, as they do not have allocated social workers, LAC reviews and Personal Education Plans. There is a growing demand for services for children and families post-adoption and for prevention work.

Division of Educational and Child Psychology (DECP) (2006, p.4).

Striving for continuous improvement of the role of the EP can be hampered or enhanced by the need to continually make room for manoeuvre within legislative changes and demands, within the roles promoted by others and those roles we espouse within our profession. The mismatch and expectations (DfEE, 2000a, p. 4, 8) arising between our own and others' perceptions can be seen to both hamper our efforts in maintaining our core identity and integrity yet can enhance our position, making us regularly examine our work. Expanding our roles in early intervention and preventative work (p. 4) continues to be a way forward that requires collaborative practice as we navigate our way with other services. Translating messages into good practice is key to improving EPS practice and for future development of services. Within the present climate of cuts to LAs, it is imperative we empower client groups and maximise resources available through joined-up strategic working. Adoption studies need a solid educational perspective. Yet, many EPs reported in a national survey, that they would need to be requested by managers of Children's Services in order to make a move into adoption work and thus 'legitimise' their entry into 'social care territory' (Norgate, Traill & Osborne, 2008) yet joint working is an area of need that was identified by Social Care (DfEEa, p. 67). Daley & Johnson (2007, p. 302) discuss an EPS that has been allocated an increase in time to work with 'vulnerable' adopted children with specialist teachers and assistants included the generic support team. As part of this team, educational psychologists have worked with all schools in the training of teachers and support assistants, focusing on educational and emotional needs. The team contributes their knowledge and experience of child development and applied psychology to the adoption and fostering panels. Some of the exemplars of good practice described in Norgate et al. (2008) can be interpreted within a definition of change management for evolving contexts. In one case described, the designated EP began work by exploring the views of stakeholders, asking SSD officers, CAMHS, and a focus group of adoptive parents and found that parents and professionals wanted schools to be more aware of the needs adopted children bring to

the classroom. Closer alliances with the post-adoption team evolved from these beginnings. Discussing the development of roles within Children Services, Fallon, Woods and Rooney (2010, p. 23) report on a case study of EPs operating drop-in consultation sessions with foster carers which raised not only awareness among social workers, but also the need for EPs to develop greater understanding of fostering and adoption procedures and the difficulties raising concerns about children's needs within schools. The creative application of 'start small, think big' 'pilot projects' (Peters, 1987) is considered relevant to generate improvement cultures (Fullan, 1991 and 1992). Developing a vision for collaborative work, may need to begin with small scale ideas to garner a niche, for example for further interactions with Social Care, including adoption work, within education.

EPs have wide-ranging and specialist skills in working with and for children, schools and families: knowledge of child development and the factors which influence behaviour, self-esteem, social interactions, learning and emotional well-being. They have the skills and abilities to 'complement' and 'add value to other work done' (DfES 2006b, p.108, 102), thus influencing the practice of significant people in the provision of appropriate and effective support (DECP, 2006, p. 9).

We can start to build an evidence base for educational psychologists' work in this area ... identified as being crucial in building a 'business case' that could be taken to managers within Children's Services departments in support of a shift in priorities in this way'.

Norgate et al. (2008, p.43).

As practitioners of educational psychology, we are aware of the impact of abuse and neglect on development, well-being and learning and of the need to work alongside parents, carers, school staff and agencies to develop effective policy and practice. We recognise that complex issues cannot be viewed in isolation from their social context. However, the severity of local and central government cutbacks and the reorganisation of LA structures create a climate in which it is more crucial than ever that EPs, as advocates of children with needs, garner strategic positions. It can be argued that EPs are able to make a 'distinctive contribution' within a 'team around the child' and community model (DfEE, 2006, p. 15, 117) in terms of strategic, collaborative work with partners in education and social care, at the multifaceted and interrelating levels of the CYP, the parent, school staff, social workers and officers, integrating and complementing knowledge thus raising awareness of differing systems. EPs occupy a 'strategic vantage point' in terms of the social and educational contexts and can facilitate a responsiveness of the education service to the needs of communities (Loxley, 1978, in Fallon et al., 2010, p. 3).

To create conditions for this improvement culture, there are clear implications for the marketing of services and for generating and sustaining roles as 'change agents'. Some of the exemplars of good practice described above illustrate creative approaches within evolving and dynamic contexts. There are incentives for the EPS, for example in terms of developing community roles for sustainability or as pilot projects to act as templates for further activities with parents alongside schools. Further impetus for working in this area can be stimulated by continuing improvement efforts by the educational psychology profession to work collaboratively in systemic ways.

Studies showing successful collaboration between home and school [detailed in Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003, p. 57] feature 'action teams' with shared responsibilities for planning, implementing and evaluating partnership practices. Contextualising social problems within collaborative cultures are stressed by Lewin:

social problems should be the catalyst for social enquiry and research, that from this research, change could be achieved but also learning could occur through the development of theory and knowledge.... change could only come about through social scientist and practitioner collaborating in action over social concerns.

Lewin (1946) in Stoker and Figg (1998, p. 56).

EPs can make a 'distinctive contribution' within LAs using their research expertise (DfEE, 2006b, p. 16; Lindsay, 1998, p. 74) affording opportunities for the communication and strategic development of theoretical and applied knowledge at the systemic level, proposed by Lewin above. A commitment to collaborative, cost-effective research and evidence-based practice is fundamental to respond to the changing context of LAs.

To play a proactive role in successful and integrative children's services, then EPs need to establish and build on collaborative alliances with other professionals to effect change (Norgate et al., 2008, p.43). Working with colleagues in Social Care in this research can support collaboration. Schools and LAs are dynamic places and EPs need a working knowledge of school effectiveness and improvement research. Research on managing change in schools (Fullan, 1991 and 1992; Howes, Davies & Fox, 2009) can provide insights into successful change processes which require EPSs to create improvement cultures to support the use of practitioner research, and to evaluate outcomes. In the climate of commissioning services, it is critical to focus on the conditions required for successful change to generate and market a responsive EPS profile. EPs will need to continually monitor processes, and adapt plans to improve the fit between the 'visionary ideal' and their working environments, i.e. 'evolutionary planning' (Fullan, 1991, 107-109) which is present at the core of this action research thesis.

1.2 Context of the participants.

Motivation for change is internal to the Adoption Support Group [ASG]. The voluntary self-development of the Group could be viewed in altruistic terms; for the benefit of children, one another and for the future role of the Group. Newly approved adoptive parents may have concerns finding socially inclusive schools and seeking educational help and advice. Most adoptive parents will have had no previous experience of parenting (Bell and Kempenaar, 2010, p. 3) and are very quickly placed in the full-time parenting role [introductions typically last ten days] of children, not babies. These are new family units that would benefit from support. It is also important to consider the influence educational difficulties have on placement stability [given disruption rates above] and quality of family life. Adoption UK (2014, p. 5) reported two thirds of parents surveyed do not feel that their child's school or teacher understands the impact of their difficult start in life due to past

trauma and neglect and recommended staff awareness of adoption and the right support in school. An aspect of the project is to facilitate information sharing and enable understanding of the impact of attachment disorders on child development and behaviour. These areas were identified by 90% adopters in the study of Bell and Kempenaar (2010, p. 9) and featured strongly in the work of Lyons (2011, p. 36). The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) (2013) has been commissioned by the DfE to produce guidance on the 'attachment and related therapeutic needs of looked-after children and children adopted from care'.

1.3 Personal interest in the study.

As an adoptive parent [having adopted a child from care], I have a personal interest in the topic being studied. I am a member of the ASG and am afforded access to the other members' views in a regular way. I am in a unique position to access parental views in a context that could be considered its natural setting. Nevertheless, I am aware my professional role, beliefs, and values as an EP and my position as the researcher, raise issues of role boundaries. Consideration of others' views as a real reflection of what is going on for them could be both enhanced and restricted by my position as an insider researcher. [A later chapter explores this position in detail].

In this ASG forum and reflected in the literature to be presented, there is a concern expressed by parents for schools to raise their level of awareness and understanding with regard to adoptive children. A previous project explored what was going well and not so well for adoptive parents in terms of their interactions with school staff. As such this review is influenced and shaped by personal experiences.

1.4 The Research Aims

The purpose of the research is to evaluate and enhance communication between adoptive parents and school staff. A need has been identified with the parents of the Adoption Support Group to create a 'resource' that is relevant to their needs and those of their children. Thus, a practical aim is to help adoptive parents in their pursuit of a 'resource' to aid their communications with school staff. The study aims to understand the current climate of information sharing between adoptive parents and school staff and to facilitate collaborative working practice with school staff. The research aims and questions are developed following the Literature Review. Briefly, the intention is to use action research in order to:

- identify and clarify the current climate of information sharing between adoptive parents and school staff;
- explore adoptive parents' views of how staff awareness of adoption issues can be enhanced;
- consider how to involve adoptive parents in supporting their children's schooling and in working together with school staff.

1.5 Summary

This study aims to evaluate and enhance communication between adoptive parents and school staff. This research is based on the assumption that the development of a resource tool around adoption issues would assist in the generation of knowledge and awareness raising in staff. More effective information sharing and collaborative working practices among different professionals, families and children would support a proactive approach and promote positive outcomes for adopted children. Schools need to seek out the views of adoptive parents to become sensitive to the needs of children adopted from care. Parents as equal partners alongside service providers is embedded in the Code of Practice for SEND (DfE, 2014d) with school staff required to consult with parents regarding educational provision for their children. EP.s can be viewed as key professionals who can support parents in making a valued contribution and thus facilitate their empowerment (Squires, Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Rooney, and O'Connor, 2007, p. 344). Community psychology literature proposes that EPs are uniquely placed, in collaboration with others, to provide generic child psychology services across the settings of home, school and community (DfEE, 2006, p. 12; MacKay, 2006, p. 13; and Norwich, Richards & sNash, 2010, p. 376). In order to realise this aim within the field of adoption, there needs to be further research on the real issues of concern for adoptive families in the context of education. It is the intention of this thesis to explore contexts which would be supportive for adoptive parents in their communications with school staff regarding their adopted children.

CHAPTER 2

Political, Social and Organisational Contexts

2.1 Introduction

Concerns around children adopted from care are influenced by political, social and organisational contexts. This section presents a review of the developments in recent policy and legislation impacting on adoption issues. Brief descriptions of the local context within the LA are provided to explore how the responsibilities and demands are realised at the local level.

2.2 Political and legislative context

2.2.1 The context for Looked After Children

The management of children in care since the Children Act 1989, has been structured by the Looked After Children [LAC] framework, which uses seven developmental dimensions [i.e. health, education, emotional and behavioural development, identity, family and social relationships, social presentation and self-care skills] to form the basis of assessment, planning and review of all children in care (Schofield, Biggart, Ward, Scaife, Dodsworth, Haynes, and Larsson, 2014, p.6). Its purpose was to improve outcomes for LAC by focusing on a developmental and ecological model, and by placing certain procedural obligations on LAs, such as detailed progress on the above dimensions, the involvement of other agencies and review protocols. Concerns about educational and health outcomes, placement instability, care leavers and [also prompted by inquiries into historic abuse in residential care], resulted in *Quality Protects*, (DfES, 1998) which aimed to improve outcomes for this group of children by emphasising the responsibility for LAC beyond Social Services Departments [SSDs] to 'corporate parents' within LAs.

Information about looked after children is collected annually from Local Authorities (DfE, 2013a, b). The numbers taken into care have continued to rise slightly from 2006 as shown in the annual Statistical First Releases (SFR) (e.g. DfE, 2011b), which provides information about looked after children including information on the number of looked after children, the reason why a child is looked after, their legal status and placement type. This rise could be affected by many factors, such as economic, demographic and legislative contexts, changes in accountability and assurance frameworks and serious case reviews. Ward, Brown and Westlake's (2012) study of ten LAs suggested that many children were left too long in abusive situations before being removed. The agenda (DfE, 2012, p. 8) to reduce bureaucracy and make 'timely, professional judgements' may have played a significant role in the rise in numbers taken into care. In addition, there has been an over twofold increase in the numbers of newborns taken into care, with about half taken from mothers with other children in care and a third from women who became mothers as teens. This seems to reflect the legislative move towards taking more 'timely' action as espoused in Government documentation [e.g. DfE, 2012, 2013, 2014i).

The educational achievements of looked after children continues to be a priority for the Government following the poor achievements, exam results, leaving prospects, disaffection and

exclusions reported in research and inspectorate reports (Goddard, 2000; O'Sullivan and Westerman, 2007). The DfE issued statutory guidance 'Promoting the Education of Looked After Children' (DfE, 2014h) requiring the appointment of a 'Virtual School Headteacher' [VSH] within each LA, whose role is to promote the educational achievement of the children looked after, to have knowledge about how the children are progressing and to assist school and social service staff to develop awareness of their additional support needs. The role is also to ensure that all looked after pupils have a Personal Education Plan (PEP), initiated by social services and includes health and education records with the aim of improving outcomes for these children and ensuring continuity of welfare needs in the case of placement moves. From the financial year 2014 to 2015, VSHs have become responsible for managing pupil premium funding for the children they look after and for allocating it to schools and non-mainstream settings. Each school has to appoint a designated teacher to support and monitor the welfare and progress of any looked after children in the school.

2.2.2 The context for children adopted from care

The following table provides an overview of legislation and policy developments in relation to children adopted from care.

Table 2.1: Timeline of policy and legislation relevant to adoption

| Year | Legislation |
|-----------|---|
| 2000 | Prime Minister's Review of Adoption (PIU, 2000) followed by the National Survey and Inspections of all Social Services Departments (SSD) in relation to adoption services and their links with other services (SSI, 2000a., b.). |
| 2002/5/11 | Adoption and Children Act and revisions . |
| 2003/4 | 'Every Child Matters'. Universal objectives for all children. |
| 2004 | The Children Act 2004. Update of 1989 Act, which introduced the legal concept of parental responsibility. The Act came as a direct response to the Climbié case. All main areas of children's services became under the local Directors of Children's Services, along with statutory responsibilities. Setting up of Local Safeguarding Children's Boards to facilitate inter-agency working and the establishment of the Children's Commissioner. This Act changes to laws relating to children, namely on adoption agencies and foster homes. |
| 2005 | Adoption Support Services Regulations. |
| 2006 | 2002 Act's 'Costs and Outcomes' Research (DfES, 2006a). |
| 2006 | 'Care Matters' (DfES, 2006b, 2007). Focus on 'prevention, early intervention and permanence. |
| 2011 | Revised National Minimum Standards for adoption services (DfE, 2011). |

| | |
|----------------|---|
| 2012 | School Admissions Code introduced the requirement that in addition to Looked After Children (LAC) having the highest priority for school admissions, previously looked after children who left care after 2005 under a residence or special guardianship order, or who were adopted from care under the 2002 Act should also have the highest priority. |
| 2012 | 'Action Plan for Adoption (DfE, 2012), introduced performance scorecards, 'fostering to adopt' to achieve possible earlier permanence while a court decides in favour of adoption. |
| May 2013 | Adoption support gap Research for Department for Education |
| September 2013 | Adoption Support Fund [England] proposed |
| October 2013 | Funding for adopted children announced, Pupil Premium plus [PP+] for children adopted from care since 2005. |
| January 2014 | Census for schools to declare numbers to receive PP+ |
| March 2014 | Children and Families Act becomes law, introducing: Duty on adoption agencies to inform adopters about their right to request an assessment of their support needs; Shared parental leave for adopters; Parity between adoption pay and leave. |
| September 2014 | Education, Health and Care Plans. Changes to the Special Educational Needs and Disability to focus on person-centred working and collaborative working between education, health and social care. |
| September 2014 | Pilot of 29 councils and voluntary adoption agencies are able to allow people approved to adopt to search the national Adoption Register from this September. |
| January 2015 | Pupil Premium and School Admissions Code extended to all children adopted from care. |
| May 2015 | Adoption Support Fund. |

It is acknowledged that the legislation above holds implications for the duties of agencies working with children adopted from care. Developments during the 1990s in adoption policy and practice led to the Adoption and Children Act 2002, implemented in 2005. The Act embodied an approach which aimed to improve adoption services, particularly adoption support. The Act's research initiatives, 'Costs and Outcomes' Research (DfES, 2006; Selwyn et al., 2006) recommended to Local Authorities (LAs) to increase the number of children appropriately placed for adoption, to improve the speed with which decisions are made, acknowledging the detrimental effects delay (DfE, 2011, p. 2). The Office for National Statistics [ONS] (Statistical Bulletin, 2013, p.2) reported the largest annual increase (over the 15 years of comparable information) in the number of children being adopted. The 2002 Act was part of a wider adoption reform policy programme which included changes to funding arrangements, incorporating ring-fenced funding for support services. A national database system, The Adoption Register, aimed to provide links between prospective adoptive parents and children. Other elements to facilitate the adoption agenda included the establishment of an Adoption and Permanence Taskforce to help LAs plan for and implement practice improvements, toolkits to enhance recruitment and regulatory National Adoption and

Minimum Standards. To reduce court delays, specialist family justice centres were formed. Measures to assess and enhance the performance of LAs included targets to increase the numbers adopted from care and 'Beacon Councils' to spread good practice. By doing so, a set of previously unavailable comparative statistical data was produced which could account for some differences in trends of numbers placed for adoption. It is noted that LAs differ in the LAC populations for which they hold responsibility. To meet anticipated levels of demand, the DfE (2011a, p. 2) proposes that the use of 'adopters from a voluntary adoption agency ... will yield savings for the local authority'.

Timpson (2014) stated that the Government is encouraging local and National Health Service commissioners to consider adopted children's needs when developing integrated services for vulnerable groups, including education services and CAMHS. Primary Care Trusts as commissioners of services have statutory duties under the Children and Adoption Act 2002 to comply with requests from LAs to help provide support and services to children in need. This includes ensuring the services they commission meet the particular needs of children in care. Adoption is included in the statutory Joint Strategic Needs Assessments [JSNA] and Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies [JHWS] guidance. The Mandate to the NHS Commissioning Board states that the NHS will be expected to work together with schools and children's social services to support and safeguard vulnerable, looked-after and adopted children, through a more joined-up approach to addressing their needs (DoH, 2013, p. 20). This affirms the need for a coherent approach for collaborative work between the EPS within the wider remit of Children's Services.

Post adoption support is documented through the Action Plan for Adoption (DfE, 2012; 2013), however, these emphasise the rights of adoptive parents to request support of their local providers, not the right to support *per se*. Local authorities are required by law to make arrangements for providing support to adoptive families and to conduct an assessment of what support each adoptive family needs, but how much support they provide resides with the LA (DfE, 2012, p. 34). The Action Plan proposed 'adoption passports' – 'transparent guarantees' of the minimum support that adoptive families will receive (p.33) which are yet to be realised.

DfE (2013, 2014i) sets out the next step in the Government's 'Tackling Delays' agenda to enable children to benefit more quickly from being adopted where this is in their 'best interests' [the term used by court] and publishes local adoption 'timeliness scorecards'. The 'scorecards' report two main strands of adoption-related data: how quickly LAs respond to prospective adopters and how quickly children are placed for adoption following the 'best interests' decision). The DfE 'streamlined' the adopter assessment process, published draft legislation to 'address the unnecessary delay in placement for adoption caused by a child's ethnicity'. [Further detailed information includes the average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, the average time between a LA receiving court authority to place a child and the LA deciding on a match to an adoptive family, the percentage of children who wait less than 21 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family and the number of children awaiting adoption]. In relation to prospective adopters, information on LA 'scores' includes: the number of approved adopters, the time taken from a registration of interest to decision of suitability to adopt,

the time taken from receipt of application form to decision of suitability to adopt, the time taken from decision of suitability to adopt to matching with child. The introduction of the scorecard system aims to ensure that LAs are held to account in terms of assessed areas of performance. Furthermore, that 'corporate parents' [the term used to describe the responsibility of the LA and all its employees and departments towards CYP in care] should be aware of their own performance in securing permanence for looked after children. The approval process for prospective adopters has been shortened to a two-step process, incorporating learning about adoption, then moving to assessment and preparation, with fast-track processes for previous adopters and approved foster carers.

2.2.3 Issues of priority status and social interest in adoption

The School Admissions Code 2012 introduced the requirement that children who ceased to be looked after because they were adopted [or became subject to a child arrangements order or special guardianship order], in addition to Looked After Children (LAC) would have the highest priority for school admissions (DfE, 2014a). Following the DfE (2013a) announcements to significant changes to the way in which adoption services are to be delivered, amendments to primary legislation, regulations and statutory guidance were planned. New approaches such as 'fostering for adoption' were developed to reduce the delay in achieving permanence in placements. Additionally, 'First 4 Adoption', the National Gateway for Adoption (DfE, 2013b) was launched to provide a route for prospective adopters to find out about adoption. 'Adoption Activity Days' were developed to make the process of matching children more adopter-led through direct access to an Adoption Register. The importance of adoption support has also been recognised through the Action Plan for Adoption (DfE, 2012), with the aim of speeding processes within the adoption system.

All children adopted from care in England and Wales, or who have left care under a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or Child Arrangement / Residence Order (RO), are eligible for the Pupil Premium (DfE, 2014, g.). This is paid to schools and other education providers to 'raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils' (in Reception to Year 11) and as part of the 'close the gap' agenda. The Government extended the coverage of the Premium 'in recognition of the traumatic experiences many adopted children have endured in their early lives and a realisation that their needs do not change overnight' (DfE, 2014e, p. 1). Adoptive parents are directed to inform schools that their child was adopted from care, and provide supporting evidence (e.g. show the school the original Adoption Order) prior to the annual School Census to trigger payment of the Premium to the school. Timpson (2014) emphasised the need for strengthening the role of universal services including education. Children adopted from care are eligible [from the schools' census January 2014] for the Pupil Premium Plus and for free early education under the programme aimed at the most disadvantaged two-year-olds. Priority school access has been extended to encompass more children adopted from care.

Recognition of needs is evident through priority admission and Pupil Premium arrangements, yet, there is a lack of 'joined-up thinking' in policy and provision in other areas of education. Bell and

Kempenaar (2010, p. 4) call for school inspections to include consideration of the provision made for both looked after and adopted children. It is noted that although school inspections include analysis of provision for LAC, the Data Dashboard system [an overview of a school's performance] includes children entitled to Free School Meals from the last 6 years, but does not include adopted who were LAC within last 6 years.

Some media divisions of the media express concern that adoption services are fraught with bureaucracy, 'hung up' on ethnic matching and are responding with proposals to reduce numbers in care and increase the use of adoption, such as, the 'third option' promoted for some pregnant women to choose adoption for their unborn child or reducing assessments of prospective adopters (the, allegedly, 'discriminated married white middle class'). [The reader is referred to The Times (Narey, 2011, p. 6)]. Adults adopted as young babies have been open to the media about their adoption [but often this maintains the stereotype of a heterosexual couple [often termed as 'infertile'] adopting a baby, usually of the same ethnic background. Some myths are being redressed through the subject of recent, mainstream television programmes [e.g. Channel 4's '15000 Kids and Counting'; ITV's 'Wanted', broadcast over 2013 and 2014]. Adoption is becoming more open and discussed in society, however, the political rhetoric could raise some confusion and, indeed inaccuracies, around adoption.

The terminology around adoption 'Finding more loving homes' (DfE, 2013a) is used to political effect. There are no other Government or related documents that have the word 'love' in the title. This may be used, for example, to underline the 'noble work' that adopters do to 'rescue' children from 'unloving homes' or to create empathy in the readers and compel them to act or be responsible for the children. Are these children the lucky ones, those who are saved from a child lifetime in care? Where is the 'love' in the documents where, services and individuals act as corporate parents? Some may argue that the financing of the Government adoption agenda and related activities would have been better spent on prevention work to support families in difficulties and reduce the numbers in the care system. In reinforcing the commitment to 'achieving adoption' where appropriate for children in care, the political debate may have become 'polarised' around emphasising the benefits of adoption by contrasting it with the 'presumed negative consequences for children who remain long-term in care' (Schofield et al.; 2014, p. 8).

2.3 The Local Authority context

This thesis describes an action research project with adoptive parents in the context of a Local Authority [LA] in the North West of England. The demographic of the area is one of higher than average economic deprivation, unemployment and ethnic minorities. The LA has been in the national spotlight regarding high profile crimes and is subject to continuous scrutiny of work practice and evaluations. This climate has led to significant changes of management positions in Social Care. To add to this, austerity measures in this LA have affected staffing levels and flexibility of work practice.

2.3.1 Adoption Services

When undergoing the requisite training as a stage prior to being approved as an adoptive parent, prospective adopters participate in three full days of training about adoption [previously four days; reduced following the introduction of the present system of approval to tackle delays (DfE, 2012)]. As aforementioned in the 'Context of the Participants', many adoptive parents are new to parenting roles and introductions are short.

Adoption support services are defined as:

- Financial support;
- Support groups for adoptive parents;
- Managing indirect [via letters] or direct contact between the adopted child and birth family;
- Therapeutic, advice and counselling services;
- Support to maintain the adoptive relationship if in difficulties [e.g. respite care, training to meet specific needs];
- Support for adoption disruptions. (Kaniuk and Fursland, 2010, p. 9)

The LA has the responsibility to assess need and access funding for these services, though may not necessarily provide for the services. Within the first three years of the adoptive placement, support services remain the responsibility of the placing authority; thereafter, the LA where the adoptive family resides, is responsible. As a consequence of the legislative changes described above, the Adoption Team in the focus LA reorganised, placing challenges on the Service that further impacted on the negotiation and development of this thesis, discussed in other sections. The recruitment and preparation of adoptive parents is a focus of the UK Government's agenda. As a member of a LA Panel which approves adopters, it is noted, albeit anecdotally, that some restrictions have been lifted on the personal circumstances of adopters [e.g. single adopters and same sex adopters], as has the time from initial inquiry to assessment and to approval, with the expectation that assessment and approval will be completed in six months. Until recently, the Panel met monthly. This has increased to twice a month in order to manage the increase in the number and speed of adoptions. The changes and pressures were additionally influenced by continuous efficiency reviews and austerity measures as the LA was required to make substantial cuts to services. For example, the attendance of some members of the Panel was affected by whether they worked at the LA and if their Service had the capacity in staffing and allocation of work to enable their members sufficient time to undertake the reading required in preparation for the Panel and, subsequently attend its meetings.

2.3.2 Educational Psychology Service

The EPS is positioned under the umbrella title of Early Help and Schools with the Local Authority Children's Services. The key outcomes are those with the ECM agenda of 'being healthy, being safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and economic well-being. The key principles of Children's Services include commitments to working to secure children's welfare and

best interests, to ensure permanence planning within four months of their becoming looked after and supporting those who remain in care at least until they are twenty one years old. Services are to be targeted 'to prevent most children from becoming children in need, whilst concentrating specialist services on children most in need to give them the best possible life chances'. Most Children's Services, with the exception of Children's Social Care [in close proximity], are now housed within one building, a strategy to enable economically viable and collaborative working practices.

The EPS operates service delivery to the LA and a consultation model of service delivery to schools, a model that has integrated reviews for reflection of practice and core consultation values. There is a commitment from the Service to maintain knowledge of the LAC children within the schools through consultation. A principle is for EPs to target efforts towards the most vulnerable in the schools on a needs-led basis. For the past two years, the EPS has operated as a part-commissioned service, with allocated numbers of visits to schools and with the option to purchase additional visits. As an EP, with a specialism in adoption and LAC, I hold additional responsibilities. I am a voluntary member of the Adoption Panel. As a steering member of the LAC Network, I meet regularly to, for example, provide training and collaborate with the Virtual School Headteacher, school staff and Social Care colleagues to improve the provision for children.

2.4 Summary

This section has provided an overview of the political, social and organisational context of children adopted from care. It has discussed the influences of recent legislation on the status of adoption, the opportunities for change and the ensuing responsibilities and demands on services, including Educational Psychology. The legislative and policy context is acknowledged in realising the aims of the thesis.

CHAPTER 3

Review of the Literature

3.1 The aim and focus of the literature review

In order to understand the research questions at the level of the Educational Psychology Service and Adoption Support Group, a more thorough understanding was needed of the context of children adopted from care and the views of adoptive parents. The review aims to synthesise the literature relevant to the field of study, exploring the impact of adoption on functioning, psychological and educational development and on emotional well-being outcomes. The previous Chapter provided a review of the policy and legislative background and related literature. The review examines theoretical perspectives that contribute towards an understanding of the context of the adopted child in schools. Parental involvement in educational contexts is evaluated followed by a critique of the research into parent-school partnerships. This Chapter explores collaborative cultures and the factors which support adoptive parents' relationships with schools. The conceptual framework of the thesis is presented. The research questions are outlined at the close of this section. The epistemological foundations of these perspectives are acknowledged in Chapter Four.

3.2 The literature review process

At the outset of the research project, a comprehensive review of the literature on adoption, adoptive parents, parental engagement and communication processes between parents and school staff was undertaken. Given the extensive range of information on parental involvement with school staff, literature was limited to a focus on enhancing communicative approaches. As a result of more recent Government reforms to the adoption and support services, it was necessary to continually update the literature searches. This review integrates as much of the relevant published literature as possible. The review process was further enhanced and refined for the purposes of this thesis by the following methods:

- Searches regarding adoption and education were confined to the UK to retain consistency of the nature of the adoption and education systems.
- Literature searches in electronic databases used *adopt*¹ child** in combination with the following words: *parent, school, educat*, teach**. The databases were accessed via the University of Manchester Library and included psycINFO, MEDLINE, HEALTH AND PSYCHSOCIAL, NERF, ERIC, OVID and the search engine GOOGLESCHOLAR.
- Literature searches in the electronic databases of collaborative research between schools and parents.
- To source a wider range of studies, the most pertinent journals (e.g. *Adoption and Fostering, Adoption Quarterly, Child: care, health and development, Educational and Child*

¹ * is used as a wild card so that the search engine includes all possible word endings, e.g. adopt* would search adopt, adoption, adopting, adopted etc.

Psychology, Educational Psychology in Practice) were searched by scrolling through lists of contents and abstracts back to 1997 in order to source relevant articles, using *adopt* child** in combination with the following words: *parent, school, educat*, teach*. collaborat**. Given the wide range of studies on parental involvement in schools, most pertinent articles and literature reviews were sourced.

- Key journals' own search systems were sourced (*Adoption and Fostering; Adoption Quarterly; Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry; Child and Adolescent Mental Health; Child and Adolescent Social Work; Child: Care, Health and Development*).
- The reference lists and bibliographies of collected articles were consulted for further relevant studies on working with parents of adopted children.
- Further reference sources within disciplines extending beyond education such as child development, social work and family practice.
- In terms of action research, searches were conducted using the strings *insider action research, collaborative / participative action research* with particular reference to *schools* or other LA organisations.
- Books were sourced on supporting children with attachment difficulties, on collaborative research with school staff and issues of inclusion.

Other sources included:

- Searches using Google and local authority sites of Local Authority [LA] guidance on supporting adopted children by entering the name of the LA and the search strings: *adopt* child** in combination with the following words: *school, educat*, support, guide*, policy, help**. This search raised nine guides and a further one from a UK country and one from a charity.
- Searches of Government papers, guidance and statistical releases in relation to *adopt* child**. The publication searches were sourced within the websites of the DfE, Department of Health (DH), Office of Public Sector Information (OPSI), Parliamentary websites.

Appendix 1 includes the search process that contributed towards an understanding of the psychological and educational outcomes of children adopted from care (Lyons, 2010).

3.3 Outcome measures of children adopted from care

Education outcomes for children in the care system are key performance indicators reported annually by LAs. Those in care consistently underperform in qualifications and other indicators in comparison to the national population (Schofield et al.; 2014, p. 149). Children who have spent time in the care system present with a higher incidence of Special Educational Needs [SEN], are more likely to have been excluded from school, display attendance difficulties, to be involved in offending behaviours, and are less likely to engage with education, training and employment beyond school, as compared to the general school population (p. 151). Research stresses the mental health vulnerability of looked after children (Ford, Vostanis, Meltzer & Goodman, 2007, p. 323).

Adopted children have similar backgrounds to looked after children both in their pre-care experiences and, to some extent, whilst in care, up to the point of the adoption in the 'best interests' decision. Issues of concerns around the children may transfer into new adoptive placements. The corollary to this might be that their experiences may also affect their schooling and their educational outcomes. It is acknowledged, however, that children being placed for adoption will differ from those in a 'hard to place' for adoption group.

There are relatively few studies of the long-term outcomes of children adopted from care. Measuring outcome is challenging. There are few outcome studies. There is significant variation within the sample populations, for example, the length of time in care prior to adoption and the age of the child. Other variations that impact on comparison of outcome measures include the selected indicators of success, for example, breakdown rates, placement stability, parental reporting and costs to services. Placement breakdown, sometimes known as 'disruption'², is a testament to this and remains as a key adoption service target in the literature and in LA returns (DfE, 2014g). Reducing adoption breakdown [albeit a crude success indicator] may need to be a key consideration for the wider remit of Children's Services, given the increases in adoption noted above. Studies exploring the causes and rates of placement breakdown report wide variation of between 3.2% and 20% of placements. Disruptions are reported to increase with the age of the child at the time of the adoption order (Rushton, 2003, Rushton & Dance, 2004, Rushton et al., 2003; Hansard, House of Commons, 2010;). Further variations may be attributed to the complexity of the samples, for example, those placements that were already reported to be in difficulty at the time of the studies. Support for adopters, openness and raising awareness of difficulties appear promising factors in reducing the chances of disruptions (Selwyn, Meakings & Wijedasa, 2014, p. 367).

Drawing conclusions from studies of adoption populations can be blurred by differences in cohorts. In terms of disruptions, most studies only include children once a placement has been found and therefore the 'success' of adoption may be overestimated (Selwyn et al., 2006, p. 9). Some include disruptions after placement while others include those taking place during the matching process. This issue should be borne in mind when considering the following information in relation to outcomes.

3.3.1 Outcomes of adopted children in relation to learning

Research suggests that adopted children achieve lower educational outcomes than their peers (Pennington, 2012; Rushton, 2003; Selwyn, 2006). Making sense of figures suggesting numbers of children presenting with SEN is difficult due to problems comparing studies of differing cohorts. Recent figures from a strand of the study of Selwyn et al. (2015, p.196), indicate that 37% of

² The term 'disruption' or 'breakdown' is defined in legislation and research in different ways that can lead to inconsistencies in data collection and reporting. In some studies, adoption disruption refers to the return of a child between the initial placement and the legal finalisation of the Adoption Order. Other studies separate adoption disruptions as 'pre' the legal adoption order and breakdown as 'post' adoption order. Many studies use 'disruption' and 'breakdown' interchangeably. It should also be noted that there is no statutory basis for the revocation of an Adoption Order except by the making of another Adoption Order, i.e. the child remains adopted if re-entering the care system.

children adopted from care had statements of SEN. The adoptive families being interviewed for a particular aspect of this study, however, were those experiencing difficulties and adoption disruptions. Selwyn et al. (2006) provide data, from parental questionnaires regarding the percentage of children with formal diagnoses. At follow-up, 50% had no diagnosis; 27% had a Statement of Special Educational Needs; 30% had mild to moderate learning difficulties; 16% had experienced exclusions; 11%, ADHD; 10% ASD. Similar figures are detailed by Cooper and Johnson (2007). Lansdown et al. (2007) report on parent and teacher ratings of 86 children, age range six to eighteen (using the Behaviour Rating Inventory of Executive Functions (BRIEF) screening questionnaire). All the children were rated as having executive functioning (EF) difficulties in the 'clinically worrying range'. Two-fifths had three or more risk factors in their background and 85% had been removed from their birth families before six years of age; presenting factors in the children's backgrounds ranging between 37% sexual abuse, 48% emotional abuse, 55% physical abuse and 60% substance abuse during pregnancy. Lansdown et al. (2007, p. 44) assert a similar population as the former in terms of breakdown of maltreatment categories. However, the fact that the children in this study were an already at risk group [i.e. were referred due to presenting problems] does set them apart from the Selwyn et al. (2006, p. 20) cohort which was selected to ensure a sample representative of children adopted from care more generally [in terms of age profile, ethnicity, disability]. The child profiles and statistics in both studies highlight the fact that the majority of the children had experienced trauma in the early years of life.

Information collected via the January 2014 School Census, for pupils at Key Stage 2, stated that children who have not spent time in the care system achieve better than those who are in care, are adopted from care or who are subject to a Special Guardianship or Residency Order (DfE, 2014d, p. 4). The attainment gaps ranged from 16 to 26 percentage points difference, depending on subject. [Comparisons with other adoptions data, suggests that less than 60% of all adopted children aged four to fifteen years were recorded, so the numbers in this report are an undercount of the accurate numbers of children adopted from care]. The data is incomprehensive and so it is necessary to interpret findings with caution

Selwyn et al. (2006, p. 250) report on the findings of a DoH funded study of 130 children, aged between 3 and 11 years, from one geographical area. At the time an 'adoption in best interests' decision was made, 95% of the children are reported to present with 'special needs'. These needs were been identified from information about the children's special needs at the time they were approved for adoption was collected from the Adoption Medical Reports and from their Form Es [produced to give the details of children needing Permanent Family Placements through fostering or adoption]. However, the information incorporated the range of problems in the categories of 'mild, moderate and severe'. A rating of 'severe' was given if the difficulty had already received a diagnosis or assessment. In cases where there had been no assessment, severity was judged on the frequency, persistence and the extent of the problem. These are children for whom comprehensive information is being gathered and for whom there may be a lack of accurate historical information. It may be in the best interests of those completing the forms that areas of need are not minimised should that area become more apparent with age. Therefore, it may be

that the category of 'mild' encompassed more children. Descriptions of the children's development came from reports from family support or social work visits. There was a notable absence of health visitor or education professional reports in this literature. Selwyn et al. (2006, p. 39) acknowledge that there was a lack of comprehensive information written in Form Es. Systematic assessments of need are required in order to impose greater rigour and elicit valid judgements.

There are issues relating to the understanding and conceptualisation of problem areas and potential solutions for adopters to garner support for their children. For example, a recent survey of LAs' adoption support specifically states that social workers cited a need for '*education colleagues [presumably EPs] to help adopters obtain a statement of SEN*' and to provide the appropriate support (Holmes et al., 2013, p. 23). The conceptualisation here seems to be one of support understood specifically as a statement of SEN. This may highlight issues relating to the terminology of SEN and to the procedures and practices at the education system and school levels. For example, what support can look like in schools without an Education, Health and Care Plan [EHC Plan]. However, the study does move on to argue that improvements in schools are required to understand how best to address the needs of adopted children in educational settings, with the availability of support during primary and secondary transition.

3.3.2 Outcomes in relation to social, emotional and behavioural development

Social, emotional and behaviour difficulties were prominent in the study of Selwyn et al. (2006, p. 250). At the time of follow-up seven years later, 47% had problems in three or more areas, including emotional, behavioural and relationship difficulties, learning problems, attachment issues, sexualised problems, with 20% of these in trouble with the law (p. 204-220). According to parents' accounts, 41% exhibited anxiety problems, over a third had problems with concentration, over a half presented with impulsivity, and 22% physically harmed others. Anger and aggression during adolescence was a significant challenge to adoptive families with child to parent violence shown by 57% in the challenging cohort described by Selwyn et al. (2015, p. 141); within the general cohort, one fifth of adopters reported 'major difficulties' with the children. It is noted that similar figures are detailed by other outcome studies (e.g. Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Lansdown et al. 2007; Rees and Selwyn, 2009; Selwyn et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2000). Problems are described within the domains of behaviour, social, emotional, and cognitive development, with associated anxiety disorders, depression and anti-social behaviours.

Rees and Selwyn (2009) report on a cohort of 130 children, recommended for adoption at the mean age of 5.7 years, using measures of emotional and behavioural adjustment gained by both parents and teachers with the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 1997, 1999, 2001). At follow-up (six to eleven years later), 82% of children were defined as having difficulties; most prevalent were hyperactivity and inattention, with highly significant correlations with attachment difficulties.

Research of adoption outcomes indicate that emotional problems, challenging behaviour and 'failures of attachment' are associated with a greater risk of 'disruption', i.e. breakdown (Beek,

1999, p. 17; Randall, 2013, p.196). Parents described how the behaviour of their children caused feelings of embarrassment, 'shame' and blame (Selwyn et al., 2015, p. 188, 244). These issues reflect the findings of Roffey (2004, p. 105) and Lyons (2011) and suggest that the behaviour agenda is potentially more complex and is associated with parental confidence, feelings of efficacy, blame and power imbalances. It is noteworthy that social outcomes are a prominent area of concern to parents of children with SEN (Lamb, 2009, p. 21). Children who have been adopted from care are also considered vulnerable to mental health problems (Bramlett, Radel and Blumberg, 2007, p. 54). These adverse experiences can affect psychological well-being, learning and behaviour with difficulties manifest within the interrelating home and school environments.

The table below presents a summary of the outcome studies, with Appendix 2 providing the table in full.

Table 2.2: Summary of outcome studies

| Study [all mixed methods] | Method of data collection | Sample [all from LA care] | Age at study | Outcomes discussed in the study |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|--|---|
| Castle et al. 2000 | Questionnaires re: school progress; Interviews of parents re: family, adjustment; Developmental Scales IQ | n = 52 Age at adoption <6 months | 4 years and 6 years. | Good social / intellectual progress; Some indication that IQ score related to adoptive family factors. |
| Cooper and Johnson 2007 | Questionnaires to parents / children | n = 141 Age at adoption <12 years | 4-16 [69%] 16+ [31%] | 39% SEN 23% with statement 28% EP involvement 20% other agencies 29% children's concerns |
| Kaniuk et al. 2004 | AAI by parents prior to adoption SDQ by parents and schools | n = 111 Age at adoption <6 years | 2-4 months after placement After one year After two years [4-8 years] | 54 of 63 late placed progress in relationships with parents and at school. 'Earlier placed the better the outcomes'. |
| Lansdown et al. 2007 | IQ WORD BRIEF Parent / Teacher ratings | n = 86 Age at adoption <6 years | 6-18 | — IQ \bar{x} =80 WORD BRIEF 'Clinically worrying range' |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| Rees and Selwyn 2009 | Parent Interviews SDQ – parents / teachers | n = 130 Age at adoption 3-11 years | 6 years later 11 years later | 38% failed placement. Remaining: 28% positive placements 62% continuing difficulties Hyperactivity / inattention / conduct / attachment 10% no positive 'rewards' reported by parents |
| Rushton and Dance 2004 [follow-up and extension of Rushton et al., 2000] | Interviews – parents / children | n = 133 Age at adoption 5-11 years | 11-16 | +1 yr 92% adoptions intact +6 yrs 71% adoptions intact disruption \bar{x} = at 34 months of placement behaviour problems aggression / destructive / overactivity |
| Rushton et al. 2000 | Case files Interviews questionnaires [parents, CSW, FSW] | n = 61 Age at adoption 5-9 years | After 1 month, 6 months, 1 year | At 1 yr – 95% intact Factors to predict outcome – emotional / behavioural 72% stability |
| Rushton et al. 2003 | As previous | As previous | After 1 month After 1 year. | Behaviour and relationship problems Post-placement support |
| Selwyn et al. 2006 | Case files Interviews - Parents / carers SDQ Costs to SSDs | n = 130 Age at adoption 3-11 years | 7-21 \bar{x} = 14.7 | Adoption + Long-term foster compared: 83% adoption intact after 7yrs 54% long-term foster intact 4% physical developmental problems 67% additional educational input. 59% involved with health specialists. 55% had been seen by CAMHS. 30% involved with the Police or Youth Offending Team. Half the children had seen an EP. Quarter of the children had a statement of SEN. |
| Selwyn et al. 2015 | Survey. Interviews. SDQ. Dataset | n = 689 children | 1 – 30 \bar{x} = 14 Most late-placed. | Clinically high range scores of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties 82%. Serious difficulties (21%). Disruption (9%). Peer relations and bullying problems in 1/3 children. Child to parent violence 57%. Ran away from home 57% children. |

3.4 Theoretical frameworks: the context of research and theory in terms of outcomes for children adopted from care

This section discusses theoretical perspectives that contribute to an understanding of the context of adopted children in schools. Theoretical perspectives and ideas within adoption issues are centred within developmental psychology and attachment theory, with other interacting and associated

theories such as social learning, developmental psychology, neuroscience and neuropsychology. These theoretical positions within the field of adoption interrelate and may suggest that difficulties displayed by adopted children are attributable to adversities caused by maltreatment within birth families and time in care prior to adoption.

3.4.1 Attachment and attachment theory

Attachment theory, as described by Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980 in Follan & Minnis, 2010, p. 640 and Schofield & Beek, 2006, p. 9) seeks to make sense of the important interaction between children's development and the care they receive. The framework provided by attachment theory considers how the quality of a child's early experiences of close parental or caregiving relationships influences development in significant ways. Contemporary conceptualisations propose that secure attachments support mental processes that enable the child to regulate emotions, reduce fear, attune to others, have self-understanding and insight, empathy for others and appropriate moral reasoning. The tenets of attachment theory hold that parenting in the early years has lasting consequences for future relationships, hypothesised as occurring through a mental representation (termed by Bowlby as an internal working model [IWM]); a cognitive structure developed in the early years to create a template for future expectations of relationships (Bifulco, Jacobs, Bunn, Thomas & Irving, 2008, p.34). These IWMs could be scripted as, for example, "I'm ok. I'm likeable. I expect others to like me. Other people are predictable." In contrast to "I'm not ok. Others are scary or unpredictable." These IWMs are expressed in terms of secure and insecure relationship styles (p.34). A child experiencing unresponsive, inconsistent or abusive parenting develops an insecure IWM that shapes relational, emotional and learning development. A key attachment concept is the capacity of the child to use the attachment figure as a secure base. Through attachment patterning and sensitive attunement, children develop the notion of a protective, safe haven and secure base from which to explore their environment and engage with others. This theory has been developed to propose that multiple attachments can occur with other significant adults and that childhood attachment relationships influence development. The concept of attachment influenced how theorists construed early experiences, with a focus on interpersonal issues [as contrasted with earlier thinking on internal processes] within a social context and with nurturing relationships necessary for later mental health (Bowlby, 1988, in Rutter, 1998, p. 109). Behaviours associated with poor attachment include problems forming relationships with peers and adults, self-destructive behaviours, and are associated with anxiety disorders, depression and anti-social behaviours with significant impact upon school functioning (Beek, 1999, p 17; Bennett, Espie, Duncan & Minnis, 2009, p. 616; Pace & Zavattini, 2010, p. 82, Smith et al., 2000, p. 560). A nurturing adult attachment provides a safe base from which the child can explore and develops the experiences and skills to help a child develop emotional regulation, self-esteem, social awareness and positive engagement with learning.

Attachment as a way of understanding a child's behaviour, thoughts and relationships is placed within the development of the whole child in context. Insecurity of attachment has significant implications for the functioning of a child across many domains, both within the family and school contexts, and, for this thesis. Attachment theory contributes to an understanding of the harm that

can be caused by abusive and neglectful relationships and of the benefits of stability and sensitive caregiving. Adoption has the potential to provide such a secure base, shaping future development and improving outcomes for children.

3.4.2 Conceptualisation and application of attachment theory to adoption issues

There is a strong body of research to indicate that attachment theory, moving beyond a social learning theoretical model [developing skills through enhancing understanding of the influence of the social environment on behavioural change] can guide support for LAC (Golding, 2003, p. 71; Holmes, 2010, p. 66; Polansky, Lauterbach, Litzke, Coulter & Sommers, 2006, p. 115). The literature on attachment (e.g. Gurney-Smith, 2010, p. 50; Golding, 2007, p. 41) emphasises a psycho-education model to further understanding by educating significant others [i.e. carers] to consider important aspects of the continuing impact of adversity on both the child's development and attachment needs. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE, 2010, p. 36) recommend education and training programmes for carers which are guided by attachment development and theory, promote an understanding the impact of trauma and loss on child development, and which teach skills to facilitate parent-child interactions (2010, p.36). Further guidelines will be published in October 2015 to consider the attachment needs and effective interventions with children adopted from the care system (NICE, 2013).

It is argued that attachment theory can also help to frame an understanding of the experiences and presentation of children adopted from care. These may be experiences due to abuse or neglect [and the traumatic consequences], the interaction of factors within early experiences, the loss of their relationships with their attachment figures, and the development of insecure attachment patterns. It is proposed that the development of secure attachments are further compounded and exacerbated by changes in care environments prior to and including the adoptive placement. The application of attachment theory to childcare literature and policies has moved beyond birth parent relationships in the early years (Rutter & O'Connor, 1999, p. 823) to expand thinking on the development of new relationships in later placements following separation from birth families. Although relatively under-developed, research on the support for children adopted from care has been particularly influenced by attachment theory, which in turn has guided the development of interventions and services (Vostanis, 2010, p. 30).

The work of Hughes (2006, 2012) emphasises working centrally with the parent-child attachment arguing that involvement with a therapist would be untenable due to problems of trust and engagement and proposing frameworks based on explicit communication of children's affective states, through, for example, 'Parenting with PACE' [Playful, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy]. The underlying principles of working directly with the central parent-child relationship on fundamental and problem issues, bears similarities to an attachment-grounded parent mentoring intervention developed by Archer and Gordon (2004). Other models of therapeutic interventions are underlined by attachment theory and development to 'repair and rebuild' attachment emphasise the importance of supporting children through the attuned and careful attention of a positive caring adult such as 'Dyadic Developmental' models of therapy (Becker-Weidman, 2010, in Aylin 2013, p.

132), the 'Secure Base' work of Schofield and Beek (2006, 2009, 2014) and models of developmental play progression to facilitate greater attunement and attachment security within adoptive families (Aylin & Stringer, 2013, p. 134). Gurney-Smith (2010, p. 51) consider the effectiveness of training interventions for both foster carers and adoptive parents. Outcome measures appear to reflect the theoretical models of the approaches; long-term follow-up of the potential influence on the relationship with the child aligning with attachment theory (p. 51). Studies of effective post-adoption services emphasise the predominance of attachment theory.

School offers stability for children who have experienced disruptions to their lives. Successful experiences within school can lead to further opportunities and success beyond education. However, the impact of neglect, abuse and related issues of attachment, may lead to the presentation of behaviours and difficulties with relationships within the school environment. Opportunities to develop relationships with teachers and with other children may not come easily without support and understanding of the likely underlying causes of and possible responses to their difficulties (Dann, 2011, p. 457). Education staff may not have a working knowledge of attachment and how this presents itself within school life, the classroom, learning and relationships.

Insecurity of attachment has widespread implications for many areas of the child's functioning, within child, within family, schools and communities. The application of attachment theory to relationships in adoption [i.e. with adoptive parents, school staff, peers] can help in understanding the origin and consequences of insecure attachment, whilst not explaining all difficulties (Rushton, 2003, p. 23).

3.4.3 Limitations and boundaries of attachment concepts

The place of attachment and attachment theory in the literature can raise questions of determinism and purism, a rigid or centric view of the singular, mother-child relationship, that does not account for the transactional, social and emotional complexities of childhood. Criticisms of attachment theory are centred on its deterministic outlook (Lewis, Feiring & Rosental, 2000, p. 719), including the use of 'deterministic' or 'predictive' attachment assessments. Boundaries to attachment theory as discussed by Rutter (1995, p. 557) are often with reference to the predictive claims to widespread aspects of later-life functioning. For example, the longitudinal study, Lecompte, Moss, Cyr & Pascuzzo (2014, p. 255) cites the relationship between disorganised attachment at preschool age to the development of low self-esteem and depression symptoms at pre-adolescence. However, there is a growing body of research evidence that a child's attachment pattern can change from insecure to secure as the relationship with caregivers improves (Ratnayake, Bowlay-Williams & Vostanis, 2014, p. 161).

Rees (2006, p.55), considering the status of attachment theory, observes that attachment is 'not a term on which Attachment Theory has a monopoly.' For instance, a cognitive-behavioural model of intervention is discussed by Rushton and Dance (2004, p. 36) where difficulties with relationships are seen as learned patterns of behaviour acquired in reaction to maltreatment. Other theoretical models and disciplines attempt to explain evolving socio-emotional dynamics in adoption families

and child outcomes based on, for example, theories of social learning, family systems, trauma, stress, developmental psychology, neuropsychology, cognitive psychology and behavioural genetics (Barth and Miller, 2000, p. 448; Howe and Fearnley, 2003, p. 385).

There are limited objective measures to evaluate interventions at the level of the adult [parent, staff] to support secure attachment behaviours in studies of LAC and adopted children (Laybourne, Andersen and Sands, 2008, p. 75). It is suggested that rather than being predictive *per se*, attachment studies can illuminate the presentation of difficulties and provide focus for targeted prevention and provision.

There is a need to move beyond a focus on pathology, diagnosis or disorders. To move from the preponderance of fixed attachment patterns which can dominate many texts and contribute to a deterministic, fixed paradigm of attachment. To move from categorisation figures [such as '40% children display insecure attachments' (quoted from Carr, 2006, p. 942)] and move from diagnostic routes [e.g. Reactive Attachment Disorders (APA, 2013)]. Awareness is needed of the often conflicting demands of government and professionals, parents, school staff and children (Billington, 2000, p. 66) towards greater consideration of the variables associated with attachment relationships (Gurney-Smith, 2010, p. 51; Howe, 2003, p. 269) to inform provision.

Although attachment difficulties are clearly important throughout children's development, there remains insufficient consensus regarding when these constitute a problem and when they require specialist input. Barth, Crea, John, Thoburn and Quinton (2005, p. 263) in their USA / UK review, contrast the focus of different countries and economic classes on attachment and propose that differences in adoption successes may be explained by the emphasis placed on attachment, social or educational functioning, not by attachment and adoption-status *per se*. Woolgar and Scott (2014, p. 363) note, through adoption and LAC casework, the assumption of attachment disorders in adopted children, without comprehensive consideration of their individual circumstances and history, yet they recognise attachment difficulties as important aspects of presentation.

For this thesis, it is important to place the attachment theory perspective into the context of children's services, namely social care and education. Within the context and agenda of social care work, SWs are often required to 'match' the characteristics of the potential carers or adopters and to undertake assessments of attachment. It holds primacy of place within texts commonly used by social workers (e.g. those of Cairns, 2002; Howe, 2005). Attachment theory has been applied to the assessment of parenting capacity and attachment insecurity in children. The Adult Attachment Interview [AAI] or Attachment Style Interview [ASI] classifies individuals as secure or insecure rather than that person's relationships with different people (Bifulco, Jacobs, Bunn, Thomas and Irving, 2008, p. 35). An earlier criticism of attachment concepts has been the tendency to apply them to an individual rather than a particular relationship (Rutter, 1995, p. 557; Schofield and Beek, 2006, p. 317). The application of attachment theory to social work practice with adopted children emphasises an understanding of the impact of caregiving experiences in attachment relationships, separation and loss to make better sense of how children may feel, think or behave (p. 317).

Attachment-based information about capacity to trust in a key attachment person, the regulation of affect, social skills and managing feelings and behaviours [e.g. a need for control, self-esteem, self-efficacy, resilience] needs to be integrated with other information, such as educational contexts, experiences and impact of abuse, neglect and trauma. Research suggests that secure attachments with school staff enable children's continuing sense of security, helping to maximise school experiences, giving them confidence to explore learning opportunities and increase their compliance to socialisation practices (Commodari, 2013, p. 124; Geddes, 2006, p. 47). Although, research makes links between attachment and school readiness and success, the specifics of the association and its strength make it necessary to further explore the nature of the processes involved (Rutter, 1995, p. 557). Indeed, as Rees (2006, p. 59) argues, if early attachments do not necessarily determine future outcomes, then, there is scope for optimism for those working with children within [or from] the care system. Complex connections between areas of development and aspects of functioning need to be regularly taken into account (Schofield and Beek, 2006, p. 319). School is a key context where attachment-related issues interact with other factors to affect progress, where aspects such as the regulation of emotion that facilitates concentration, and the previously identified weakness in executive functioning skills [task persistence, adaptation, planning] are manifest. Indeed, the texts that are proving popular within schools [given their presence on reading lists of, for example, attachment-aware schools' websites] are those which use an attachment perspective to contextualise aspects of functioning and how to approach interventions.

EPs function in interaction with others at the individual or group CYP level, the family context and within organisations of schools and LA partners. EPs, by the nature of their 'distinctive contribution and knowledge' (Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Rooney, Squires and O'Conner, 2006, p. 16, 30, 101) are experienced by others through these interactionist perspectives and collaborative working practices. EPs draw on various theoretical perspectives, interpretive paradigms and causal explanations in their work. Attempts to isolate attachment as a distinct issue can be unhelpful and can fail to take into account contributory contexts.

3.4.4 The place of attachment theory in this thesis

Contextually grounded attachment theory can contribute to an understanding of the complex interpersonal dynamics involved in supporting children from care, explore why interventions work and consider the processes of change (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, in Rushton and Monck, 2009, p.23). The strength of attachment theory for this thesis is in the framework which offers a conceptualisation of the context of the adopted child within the home and school. In recent years, attachment theory has been expanded to apply to the context of the school environment to recognise the impact of attachment on children's emotional, social development and learning and the capacity for positive influence by school staff (refer to the work of Cairns, 2010; Bomber, 2007, 2011; Geddes, 2006; Bomber and Hughes, 2013). For example, Geddes (2006) is explicit in connecting insecure attachment patterns to their impact on skills, tasks and relationships in school. The concepts of an 'attachment friendly school' and an 'attachment figure' have entered whole school vocabulary, with interventions and whole school approaches (e.g. Bomber, 2011). While the

approaches are embedded within the literature of attachment, school-specific approaches lack evaluative measures. Other comparative studies to support emotional and social development, for example, nurture groups, present clear pre- and post-evaluations at the level of the child [often using the Boxall profile, Bennathan and Boxall, 1998; see Hughes, 2014]; the consistency of measures allowing for comparisons. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) (2013) has been commissioned by the DfE to produce guidance on the 'attachment and related therapeutic needs of looked-after children and children adopted from care' which may trigger further evaluations.

Of particular relevance to this thesis, as it relates to 'knowledge' and 'understanding' themes identified in Lyons (2011) is the integration of theories and paradigms to inform approaches with adoptive parents explored in the work of Rushton and Monck (2009). A randomised controlled trial was employed to test the effectiveness of approaches to reduce the risk of placement disruption and to improve the quality of relationships (p.19). Approaches were trialled based on cognitive behavioural and educational programmes [with a further control comparison of usual adoption support services] to supporting adoptive parents. The former was adapted from Webster-Stratton, 1998 and 2003 (p. 29). The latter was based on improving understanding and working with parents' 'construction of meaning', and, as such, it was driven by attachment theory and included social and environmental influences [schools, family and friends] (p.31). Following evaluations, the training programmes integrated the two approaches to formulate a training programme (Rushton and Upright, 2012). Both interventions were highly valued: it appears that gaining understanding was valued equally with behavioural advice (Rushton and Monck, 2009, p. 177). In the context of this thesis, the opposite, and, again, deterministic view could be posed: that adoptive parents, school staff are potentially powerless to change what has been, due to abuse or neglect, an established attachment pattern. It is imperative that interventions or approaches to support adopted children are outward looking; considering explicitly the interactionist perspective.

Attachment perspectives, thinking and theory have significantly shaped the way that early adverse experiences are viewed and related interventions. What is most interesting and applicable to this thesis is its application to the school environment and the context of adoptive parenting. The emergence of contemporary literature on attachment [e.g. those that are more popularly used within the educational sphere, such as the texts from *Worth Publishing* group], may signal a move beyond the theoretical, deterministic contribution of attachment theory towards a more contextual position for attachment perspectives. These perspectives can inform adoptive parents, professionals, including school staff, EPs, SWs, when working to support children adopted from care.

3.4.5 Neuroscience and neurodevelopment

The advances in developmental neuropsychology and neuroscience hypothesise that disrupted attachment relationships can cause trauma and affect brain development (e.g., Fox, Cahill and Zougkou, 2010; Kertes, Gunnar, Madsen, and Long, 2008). Understanding of the complex and

often persistent challenges in attachment and recovery from trauma, is of significant value to professionals working with adopted children and their families.

Brain development and affect regulation in the context of severe stress and trauma has been receiving explanations by attachment researchers and developmental neuroscientists (e.g., Fox and Rutter, 2010; Fox et al., 2010; Kertes et al., 2008; Minnis, 2013; Purvis et al., 2011; Schore, 2001; Wolf, 2009). Developmental research with children indicates that stress responses are active early in life and are responsive to social and emotional conditions (Kinniburgh, 2005, p. 424). The abusive and/or neglectful early environments place children in a stressed, 'unregulated, unrepaired' state, causing neuronal damage and possible acquired brain injury. A lack of appropriate stimulation may cause the underdevelopment of neural pathways.

Research indicates that abuse and neglect can have an impact on children's development. Research into the impact of trauma on children's neurological development indicates that brain development [e.g. functional impairments of cognition, language, emotion] and physical development [e.g. immunity] can be affected as a result of elevated levels of stress chemicals and repeated exposure to stress, sometimes termed 'toxic stress' (Perry and Szalavitz, 2006; van der Kolk, 2005; Wright, Ginnen and O'Neill, 2012). Developmental pathways of early adversity and the impact on children's outcomes, is considered particularly influential when it occurs during the 'formative' early years (Egeland, 2009, p. 25, Perry and Szalavitz, 2005, p. 247). It was often previously thought that as young children were unable to remember their adverse abusive and neglectful experiences, they could then make a full recovery. Research indicates that brain development plasticity co-exists with plasticity for adaptation and recovery, both contributing to long-term outcomes with potential damage to neural networks appearing to be 'more compromised' in young children (Ball and Howe, 2013, p. 70). The literature can sometimes frame the functionality of brain differences in children in straight associative terms. For example, children may be described as having brains that are 'wired' up to deal with their negative environment (Wright et al., 2012, p. 4). However, research is emergent and not at a stage of being able to make definitive and reliable predictions about what types of brain changes arise from different forms or severity of abuse at different ages and related vulnerability (Woolgar, 2013, p. 4, 241).

The application of neuroscientific research findings to educational practice or developmental psychology is complex (Dekker, Lee, Howard-Jones and Jolles, 2012, p. 1; Swaab, 2014, 393). Reliably translating scientific advances [e.g. considering neuroplasticity or the notion of 'sensitive periods' across development] for practical purposes is challenging. Findings are emergent, too easily misunderstood, insufficiently contextualised or overgeneralised (Shonkoff and Bales, 2011, p. 18, 20). 'Differential susceptibility' can describe individual-level differences in children's sensitivity to their environments and vulnerability to adversity (Woolgar, 2013, p. 237). The findings from neuroscience involve complex interactions across the domains of child functioning and it is difficult to make definitive sense of these for professionals working with children and families. The science has important consequences for policy; its pertinence strongly promoting the importance of early intervention programmes (Allen, 2011, p. 13). Early intervention programmes can glean further political power with the association of neuroscientific findings. Neurological advances are

able to inform our conceptualisation of the presenting issues, not in a deterministic manner, but rather in the context of the whole child and can support our understanding of the potentially persistent effects of abuse, neglect and trauma. It is important to consider neuroscientific concepts not as 'facts' that imply direct correlations to functioning, but rather that they may provide some insights and also further our thinking and questioning.

So, how can findings be applied to this thesis? With considered reflection [Chapter Five, Insider Researcher] and acknowledgement, of the epistemological position, that outcomes for children are determined by multiple interacting factors. Is this neutrality avoiding a stance? Not if we consider the interactionist position of the EP. There can be a tendency to assign particular importance to partial accounts of the biological science at the expense of the 'links between parenting and children's development more generally' (Belsky and de Haan, 2011, p. 409). The literature emphasises the contribution of stress and trauma on the children, but it is important not to ignore the influence of factors prior to mistreatment or abuse, such as pre-natal substance abuse or other issues of stress, nutrition or health, including vulnerability to inherited mental health problems (Rushton and Dance, 2002, p. 8). Children are more than 'just their brain structure, their physiology, their caregiving history, their attachments or their genetics in isolation' (Woolgar, 2013, p. 239). An individualised approach is promoted within this thesis to work with adoptive parents; an approach which takes account of the psychological factors within and around the child, family and school systems

3.4.6 Summary relating to theoretical frameworks

There are a number of areas to focus on when considering the context of a child adopted from the care system. Research indicates that developing skills and an awareness in educational professionals of how to support children and young people's emotional needs and development can promote better learning and health outcomes. This section has attempted to take a socio-cultural perspective looking at attachment theory and the knowledge from neuroscience about trauma and development. It is suggested that these theories inform the context and conceptual understanding of adopted children, and the position of adoptive parents, the EPS and social services.

3.5 The Context of Engagement with Parents

3.5.1 Parental involvement in schools

Research over many years consistently indicates that parents are the most important people in their children's lives, and that their support for their children's learning and development is crucial (NQIN, 2010, p.2). The effectiveness of parental involvement in facilitating academic achievement has been reported by meta-analyses and key research and the concept has been widened to include benefits to parent-teacher relationships, teacher morale, school climate, improved school attendance, attitudes, behaviour and mental health of children, and, increased parental confidence, satisfaction and interest (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003, p. 52; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011, p. 37).

Supporting practitioners to engage more effectively with families was key to various government policies for improving outcomes for children (DCSF: 2003, 2004, 2010; Humphrey and Squires, 2011). Although the concept of partnership has been around for many years, there is now a greater understanding that this means a commitment to collaborative relationships. Schools that successfully engage parents consistently reinforce the fact that 'parents matter'. They develop a two way relationship with parents based on 'mutual trust, respect and a commitment to improving learning outcomes' (Harris and Goodall, 2007, p. 5). Parent and teacher interactions and roles are frequently shaped by differing expectations and vested interests and are benefitted when parents play a role as partners in the planning and delivery of services (Wolfendale, Russell, Norwich and Lindsay, 1999, p.7). Studies showing successful collaboration between home and school [detailed in Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003, p. 57] feature 'action teams' with shared responsibilities for planning, implementing and evaluating partnership practices. Literature indicates that parental involvement can be conflicted when each party seeks to maximise its own agenda, independent of that of the others (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, p. 45).

Parents as equal partners alongside service providers is embedded in the Code of Practice for SEN (DfES, 2001; DfE, 2014,b) with school staff required to consult with parents regarding educational provision for their children. EPs can be viewed as key professionals who can support parents in making a valued contribution and thus facilitate their empowerment (Squires, Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Rooney & O'Connor, 2007, p. 344). MacKay (2006) discusses the contemporary relevance of the concept of community psychology and proposes that EPs are uniquely placed, in collaboration with others, to provide generic child psychology services across the settings of home, school and community. Norwich et al. (2010, p. 376) substantiate this with respect to children in care services. In order to realise this aim within the field of adoption, it is suggested that there needs to be further research beyond the scope of this thesis on the real issues of concern for adoptive families in the context of education.

Parental engagement has a large and positive impact on children's learning (DfE, 2011b). There is a well-documented relationship between parental involvement in schools and positive outcomes in children's learning and behaviour (Charles, Bywater and Edwards, 2011, p. 10; Dunsmuir, Frederickson and Lang, 2004, p. 109; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011, p. 44). Parental partnership is linked to participation and collaboration with all parents. Inclusion is not limited to SEN, but can be flexible to relate and subsume other 'interest groups' (Griffiths, Norwich and Burden, 2004, p. 419). The legislation associated with LAs' integrated children's services aimed to facilitate inter-agency working and responsibilities to promote positive outcomes for children (*Every Child Matters* (ECM) (DfES, 2003); *The Children Act* (DfES, 2004) and the formation of The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in 2007.

Increasing parental confidence in the SEN assessment system is the central tenet of the Lamb Inquiry (Lamb, 2009). It features strongly within Achievement for All (Humphrey and Squires, 2010, 2011a, b). It should be acknowledged that the term 'parenting' in these documents refers to a

broad range of caregivers, including those with a Special Guardianship Order (SGO), foster families, and 'corporate parents' of children in the care system, in addition to adoptive parents.

3.5.2 Working with adopted children and parents

The very nature of adopted children's experiences means that they, and their new adoptive parents, will come into contact with a greater number of professionals than would be the case with children and parents who access the usual 'universal services' [and that is notwithstanding those who may have SEN and thus have additional professional involvement]. It is important to recognise these contexts when working with this group of parents. Norgate et al. (2008), through questionnaires to Principal Educational Psychologists [PEPs], examined the nature and extent of work carried out by EPs in relation to fostering and adoption. EPs tended to respond to work with adopted children [and thus, their adoptive parents] via their generic services. The respondents indicated that while they were aware that adopted children were, broadly speaking, more vulnerable than the general population, this was not factored into service delivery arrangements (p. 95). Separating the time devoted specifically to each was not considered meaningful in practice, in particular related to strategic and systemic work and training. Results indicated that respondents would value more time to effectively support adoptive parents who were experiencing significant problems, to offer therapeutic work and assessments with individuals, to extend joint work with social care and health professionals and to move towards proactive planning in this area (p. 81). The main aim of the work was to promote a better understanding of the needs of the children with a view to reducing the risk of placement breakdown both at home and school (p. 43). Norgate et al. (2008) describe an example of good EP practice in this field (p.72). A designated EP began work by exploring the views of stakeholders (Adoption Service, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, adoptive parents) and found that parents and professionals wanted schools to be more aware of the needs adopted children bring to the classroom. The EP reported that closer alliances with the post-adoption team evolved from these beginnings.

The literature presents examples of services providing direct training with adoptive parents and awareness-raising through collaboration with other services to meet the needs of adopted children. Post-adoption support sections of social services may offer training for adopters when children are placed, though this varies between authorities (DfE, 2014c, p. 88). A small number of organisations provide a range of support for families who foster and those who adopt, not differentiating between the two, arguing that both groups of children have similar issues (Comfort, 2007, p. 28). This has included helping carers and parents 'negotiate the complicated maze of special education at school' (p.29). Some have adapted parenting skills programmes for use with adoptive families, such as those of Webster-Stratton, working with adoption-specific material (e.g. Gilkes and Klimes, 2003, p. 24; Henderson and Sargent, 2005, p. 35). Guidance and meta-analyses (DfES, 2005, p. 24; Golding 2006 in Golding, 2007, p. 41; Holmes et al., 2013, p. 13; Sharac, 2011, p. 110) assert that additional parenting tasks and challenges involved in adoption require enhanced or 'parenting plus' skills, resilience and considerable emotional resources. Further developments in group interventions combine social learning and attachment theories to inform the parenting of adopted and LAC with behavioural and emotional problems (Golding, 2007,

p. 42). Arguing from the position of adoptive parents, the charity Adoption UK claims that parents need continuing training and support on child development, and how this is affected by the trauma of abuse and neglect and attachment issues. They also recommend adoption-aware, joined-up services across educational, social care and health, where professionals should be trained in the issues of trauma and attachment (Adoption UK, 2014). Problems in attachment are often presented as the most accepted explanation for the possible problems of adopted children in the literature within social care (Barth and Miller, 2000, p. 448). This is unsurprising given that, for parents, rejection of affection is reported as the most challenging behaviours within the home, along with aggression and persistent non-compliance (Rushton and Dance, 2002, p. 14).

Studies of professionals working with adoptive parents within educational contexts are few in number. This may be due to the historical divide of education and social care domains. Staffing issues could impose constraints on inter-departmental work. Further development of evidence-based approaches is justifiably needed and, indeed demanded, within the present climate of austerity measures.

Holmes et al. (2013, p. 24) report, from a survey of LAs and from interviews with social workers, that a small number [three from 50 LAs] carried out specific work in schools highlighting the needs of adopted children and their families, which encompassed the circulation of information packs, undertaking workshops, creating links between schools and other agencies [e.g. CAMHS] and working with staff and adoptive parents to address the needs of individual children. Participants made reference to the perceived importance of understanding attachment theory and difficulties, with some raising concerns about a need for further specialists in this area. Half of the interviews reported that improvements were needed for the availability of education support for adopted children, and specifically in how to address needs within an education setting, such as at school transitions. The survey of LAs found that services most frequently requested by adoptive families were also those identified by the interviewees as being the services where there were the biggest gaps in service provision: CAMHS and therapeutic services, and educational support (Holmes et al., 2013, p. 22).

Osborne & Alfano (2011) examine the use of EP consultation sessions offered to foster carers and adoptive parents, with the majority of the enquiries relating to behavior management, followed by education issues and emotional well-being of the children. The rationale for offering consultation sessions was to provide bespoke support and time to allow for detailed consultations (p. 407). Positive feedback about the sessions with reports that participants found it helpful to be able to discuss their concerns, receive practical advice on strategies, set goals and gain new insights. The comments were supported by measurable changes in their levels of concern and confidence. The authors conclude that the consultations offered a welcome source of support to carers and adoptive parents as well as having an immediate impact on their perceptions of their abilities to manage issues of concern. Feelings of self-efficacy and confidence are key strands emerging from this literature review. Although practical help was highly valued, it is important to note that participants also gained reassurance and affirmation from having validation that their current strategies were appropriate. Both practical and emotional support were considered viable ways of

providing the consultation service. Discussing the development of roles within Children Services, Fallon et al. (2010, p. 23) report on a case study of EPs operating drop-in consultation sessions with foster carers which raised not only awareness among social workers, but also the need for EPs to develop greater understanding of fostering and adoption procedures and the difficulties raising concerns about children's needs within schools. Table 3.1 presents research studies with adoptive parents in relation to education.

Table 3.1 Studies working with adoptive parents in an educational context.

| Study | Data collection | Participants | Context | Outcomes |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|---|--|
| Golding (2010) | Case study | LA | Integrated service for looked after and adopted children. Jointly managed by Health and Children's Services. | Aims to maximize placement stability. Work with social care and education professionals to provide support. Training and group work. Voice to the children. Increase in confidence and understanding. |
| Holmes et al. (2013) | Survey Interviews | LAs Social Services | Determine provision of and barriers to post-adoption support. | Services most requested by families: CAMHS, therapeutic services and educational support. Largest gaps in provision: CAMHS, therapeutic services and educational support. 50% social services respondents reported that improvements were needed in the availability of education support for adopted children. Need for additional support during periods of transition. 3 interviewees reported they carried out specific work in schools highlighting the needs of adopted children [information packs, training, workshops, liaison between schools and other agencies]. |
| Norgate et al. (2008) | Questionnaires Case studies | LAs 108 PEPs | Study of nature and extent of multi-disciplinary work carried out by EPs in relation to adoption [and fostering]. | [NB. Results related to Fostering and Adoption work combined]. EPs tend to respond to adopted children via generic services. Approximately 70% services involved in some kind of fostering and adoption work, including consultation, training, therapy, assessments and work with panels. To promote better understanding of needs and reduce breakdown in placements [home and school]. Twice the time was spent on fostering work compared to adoption. Average rating of the importance of fostering or adoption work. 8.32 [scale low 1-10 high]. |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| | | | | Case studies of LAs: e.g. EP work [pamphlet for schools, training, consultation service]; e.g. EP working on the Adoption Panel. |
| Osborne et al. (2009) | Relates to Norgate et al. (2008) above | | | |
| Osborne and Alfano (2011) | questionnaires | 26 adoptive parents County authority | Study of consultation sessions provided by EPs to adoptive parents and carers. The majority of the enquiries related to behaviour management, education issues and emotional well-being of the children. | Positive feedback about the sessions with reports that participants found it helpful to be able to discuss their concerns, receive practical advice on strategies, set goals and gain new insights. The comments were supported by measurable changes in their reported levels of concern and confidence. |
| Selwyn et al. (2015) | Survey. | 77 LAs. | Post-adoption support. | Few LAs with educational liaison. Problems attributed to staffing and budget cuts. In 2 LAs, termly consultation sessions from EPs. Workshops. Video interactive guidance. Some LAs had dedicated adoption workers within the 'Virtual School' system to ensure that children had a key worker in school, a PEP and a transition plan. |

Daley and Johnson (2007, p. 302) discuss an EPS that has been allocated an increase in time to work with 'vulnerable' adopted children with specialist teachers and assistants included the generic support team. As part of this team, educational psychologists have worked with all schools in the training of teachers and support assistants, focusing on educational and emotional needs. The team contributes their knowledge and experience of child development and applied psychology to the adoption and fostering panels.

Some training programmes acknowledge the uncomfortable feelings of personal failure or blame when discussing behavioural issues of concern (Webster Stratton, 2005, p. 212, 222) which aligns with the work of Roffey (2004). This may also reflect the notion that further reflective learning takes place when we move out of our 'comfort zone' (Liepold, Rasmussen, Boyce & Poskas, 2013, p. 77) we 'shift' and thus, challenge our thinking. It is reported that adoptive families wait too long before requesting help from services (Rushton, 2003, p. 29). Feelings of discomfort or failure may begin to explain this delay. Polarised views of the parent-child relationship may be apparent here. If parents are of the view that problems are within-child due to their adoption status and their history,

then how parenting will be approached is affected and the prognosis for parental change is reduced. By contrast, if parents believe that they are incapable or de-skilled in parenting tasks, they may deny the need for help or support. Neither position is optimal for change and development.

Personalisation of work with parents, parent reference groups, increasing confidence and flexible approaches are advocated in the literature to remove some barriers to engagement (Harris and Goodall, 2007, p. 68, 69, 74). Schools that successfully engage parents are those which develop a two-way relationship with parents based on mutual trust, respect, and a commitment to improving learning outcomes with bespoke forms of support (p. 5). Individualisation was a key theme from a literature review related to terms of parental engagement (Day, 2013, p. 38). In relation to work with adoptive parents, the thesis is exploring the personalisation of the communicative relationship between adoptive parents and school staff.

3.5.3 Studies of adoptive parents' views

As demonstrated by the research detailed above, problems experienced by children adopted from care present within the domains of behaviour, social, emotional and cognitive development. However, with reference to this project, parental views of these difficulties in the context of schooling are often absent from the research (Lyons, 2010). This thesis asserts that generating a richer understanding of the difficulties presented can be obtained by exploring parents' constructs and the particular dynamics of adoptive parenting in the context of education.

It is acknowledged that many studies report on the views of those adoptive parents who are in known contact with services and more needs to be known about the views of adopters who do not connect with support groups, have withdrawn contact with services or have experienced a breakdown in placements.

The thesis is interested in exploring the communications with school staff and perspectives of adoptive parents. Adoptive parents' contributions within the literature, although few in number, focus on parents' responses via ratings, interviews and questionnaires with regard to learning, social, emotional, behavioural and attachment outcomes. Of relevance to this research is the study of Selwyn et al. (2006, p. 282) which revealed a 'wish list' from adoptive parents to include explanations of learning difficulties and their impact, additional training in and 'briefing notes' about behaviour management. Parents voiced examples of curriculum subjects that created stress for the children, such as family trees and discussions around births. Via questionnaires of 300 parents, using the database of the LA family placement service to ensure anonymity, EPs, Cooper and Johnson (2007, p. 25), explored adoptive parents' opinions about school and elicited quantitative and qualitative data about adopted children's experiences in education. Most parents (90%) had shared some information with the school about their child's adoption. When asked to specify further how schools could help their children, greater understanding and communication were the main recommendations. The majority stated they would value access to a named person with knowledge of adoption issues, opportunities to discuss educational issues with other parents and

speakers as part of a group, access to someone who represents their views in discussions with schools, and, a drop-in centre with information and advice on educational matters. They suggested access to an 'expert' parent, training for education and school staff, [written and electronic] information about education for schools and parents, and a joint forum for adoptive parents and school staff to discuss how they can better help the children. The survey findings highlighted the need to support parents and school staff in sharing information; to promote emotional well-being and resilience of adopted children; and, to raise awareness in school staff of attachment and how adoption issues may have lasting effects on educational and social progress. The suggestions have relevance to the future planning of provision. Particularly pertinent to this thesis is the recommendation for school staff and education support agencies to develop effective relationships with parents. Indeed, Cooper and Johnson suggest the expansion of the role of the designated teacher for LAC to encompass adopted children, with those children afforded the same priority in terms of access to specialist services. The research concluded that adoptive parents present as 'realistic about the sometimes intransigent or complex nature of their child's difficulties and accept that there may not be specific remedies'. However, they also stress that a positive and understanding attitude by school staff can 'make a difference for their child' and are keen that this be promoted (p. 25).

Selwyn et al. (2015) report that 51% of children were already of school age when they moved in with their adoptive family. Adopters described how they were advised to promptly start their children at new schools. Several adopters thought the children had started school too quickly, needed more time to settle at home to develop relationships with their new family rather than face another stressful transition in their lives (p.107). The study does not explore this issue in further detail, although it raises questions around the position of knowledge and awareness of the children [albeit here possibly in hindsight] and the parent voice [themes elicited by Lyons, 2011]. Parents reported frustration in their dealings with some professionals who did not treat them as 'reliable and credible informants' (p. 244). Many parents stated that they wished they had sought help earlier in the adoption and that they had been more assertive with professionals. They reported that, generally, they felt that school staff had little understanding of the needs of their children. Despite that view, about half of the parents in the study stated that they had received good support from particular individual educational professionals, including SENCos, headteachers, teachers, assistants and educational psychologists (p. 187).

Research suggests that many adoptive parents want to be helped in their roles (Rushton and Upright, 2012, vii). Norgate et al. (2008, p. 72) report that that professionals and adoptive parents wanted schools to be more aware of the needs of adopted children in schools. Adoption UK (2014a, p. 5) reported two thirds of parents surveyed do not feel that their child's school or teacher understands the impact of their difficult start in life due to past trauma and neglect and recommended staff awareness of adoption and the right support in school. Over a third of the 99 continuing placements reported by Rushton and Dance (2004, p. 55) experienced chronic difficulties, yet, the parents report working hard to maintain the adoption situation. Investigations into adopters' feedback on services suggest that the process of engagement with professionals can be complex and sensitive with barriers to communication. The concepts of defending and

protecting adoptive children are present in Lyons (2011). Adoptive parents can find it difficult to admit to difficulties, feeling that they 'run the risk of being seen to be unsuitable parents' (Rushton, Monck, Upright and Davidson, 2006, p. 26). The following table presents an overview of the research studies into adoptive parents' views.

Table 3.2: Studies of adoptive parents' views about how schools could help their children and of their experiences within education.

| Study [all mixed] | data | Sample [all from LA care] | Age at study | Adoptive parents' views on how school staff could help and their experiences within education and related issues. |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|-------------------------------|--|
| Adoption UK (2014a) | Questionnaire to parents | 1500 parents 2101 children | Across age range | 71% parents think that experiences of neglect or abuse impacts on school life academically; 75% impact on social ability. 75% stated that staff expect their child to do well in school due to their new adoptive circumstances. |
| Cooper and Johnson 2007 | Questionnaire to parents / children | n = 141 Age at adoption <12 years | 4-16 [69%] 16+ [31%] | Main recommendations: Greater understanding and communication of adoption issues by school staff. Good relationship between staff and parents. Most parents (78%) were generally satisfied with the involvement of other agencies but between a quarter and a fifth of them felt uninformed and/or dissatisfied. Criticisms focused on frustration about delays in their child's difficulties being identified and acknowledged, the unavailability of resources, waiting too long for appointments and having to 'fight' for recognition and support. |
| Rushton and Monck (2009) | Randomised controlled trial. Adopters allocated to 1 of 3 groups: Behavioural parenting advice; Tailored adoptive parenting education programme; Weekly feedback. Control group. | 37 adop- ters | 3-8 years. | Bespoke, regular, home-based intervention. Intervention group parents: - more likely than other groups to have used different strategies to deal with 'misbehaviour.' - Changed aspects of their parenting. Slow change for children in the early stages of the programme. Overall, change was not statistically significant for children. Individualised working through of a problem was one of the most valued aspect. Advisor role to move forward existing skills and understanding. |
| Rushton and Upright (2012) | Randomised controlled trial. Development of parenting programme Early trials see Rushton and Monck (2009). Re-trials | 37 parents | 3 - 8 years. | Parents want help in their roles. Positive changes to parenting behavior. Progress in understanding children's problems. Parents valued a bespoke, regular, home-based intervention. |

| | | | | |
|----------------------|--|---|-----------------------|--|
| Selwyn et al. (2006) | Mixed methods. Case files Interviews | 70 parents. | 7-21 — x = 14.7 | Support services were 'too little, too late'. Education service provision and S.E.N. systems were considered 'confusing and unresponsive.' Parents voiced examples of curriculum subjects that created stress for the children, such as family trees and discussions around births. 'Wish list' from adoptive parents to include: Guidance on access to services; Explanations of learning difficulties and their impact; Additional training in and 'briefing notes' about behaviour management. |
| Selwyn et al. (2015) | Interviews. Survey. SDQ. Parenting confidence and satisfaction. Dataset. | 70 parents, 12 children, 12 SSD. Survey (390 parents) SDQ (70). Dataset of 37,335 children in 77 LAs. | 1-30 — x = 14 | Half stated they had received good support from educational professionals. In general, school staff had little understanding of the needs of the children. Aspects of the curriculum caused distress to the children. Primary to secondary transition thought to cause additional stress. |

The literature acknowledges that adoptive parents may present with a strong wish to address attachment issues in their children (Barth, et al., 2005, p. 263). Given the need for adoptive parents to reduce insecure attachment behaviours and develop secure attachments in their children, this is plausible. However, concerns around attachment difficulties are in strong contrast to the terminology and subsequent treatment and prognosis of attachment disorder. What is generally absent from the studies of adoptive parents' views, is a 'push for a label' of Attachment Disorder. It may be apparent that the parents want to raise awareness and understanding, maybe raise the status of the children, but the corollary of this does not appear to move towards the diagnostic route of disorders, more towards the consideration of the range of difficulties. The term 'disorder' may be associated with deficit rather than difference (Riddick, 2012, p. 33). The broader term 'attachment difficulties' is often used as an overarching term to encompass a range of problems that may be presented. A label can bring together related difficulties, suggest a developmental pathway, can further understanding and indicate educational needs. A distinction is made between 'private' [particularly pertinent to adoption] and public labels in discussing enabling and educative aspects of both in terms of understanding and support (p. 31). Labels can be dynamic; 'strong' forms used when discriminated against; the need lessening when understanding increases [when school provision is highly inclusive]. A paradox is raised that the more, for example, 'autism or dyslexia friendly' a school becomes, the less the need for children with 'milder' difficulties to be labelled as such (p. 31). Labelling processes with children demand careful on-going monitoring of use and outcomes, and consideration of needs for discretion and individual

preference (p. 33), particularly important in the context of access to confidential and sensitive information within adoption.

As discussed above, many parent training interventions are focused on changing the behaviour of the parents. These are mainly derived from social learning theory and involve the coaching of skills rather than changing parental beliefs (Scott, 2003, p. 309). Whilst addressing the needs of adoptive parents, studies need to acknowledge the conceptualisations therein. Parent-child difficulties may be conceptualised in reductive terms of 'within child' problems due to the child's adoption status and experiences pre-care and in care. Paradoxically, not, in fact, as 'parent-child' conceptualisations. In this way, parents may feel absolved of personal responsibilities and with this feeling may come the thought that improvement work should be centred on the child, with little focus for reflective and interpersonal development. In the context of this research, the author would stress that there is a need to acknowledge parents' views and attributed meanings. As maintained by Pawson and Tilley (1998a, p. 82), it is not interventions that work, per se, but the 'mechanisms that they release by way of providing reasons and resources to change behaviour'.

Adoptive parents identified their own strengths in having specific knowledge of adoption and their children, leading to the views that they can help develop staff awareness, and they need to be listened to, understood and trusted to work in partnership with school staff (Lyons, 2011). Parents suggested collaborative work would include facilities for shared discussions with staff and the provision of a 'resource tool' to promote knowledge and understanding of the children's needs.

3.5.4 Partnerships and collaborative cultures

The sections above discussed the benefits of collaborative practice with parents. There is a role for professionals to facilitate multi-agency practice with evidence-based interventions. Sharac, McCrone, Rushton and Monck, (2011) examine the cost-effectiveness of parenting programmes to improve outcomes for adopted children with behaviour problems. The programmes were not deemed cost-effective in terms of child outcomes; improvements were noted solely in terms of parental satisfaction and perceived value. It could be hypothesised that outcomes did not show significant improvements as the interventions were focused primarily on parents. Sustaining positive outcomes requires the combined focus and shared aims of home and school partnerships, within complex multi-faceted situations. Desforges and Abouchaar (2003, p. 52) provide a literature review of studies which focus on the 'connectivity' between home and school. Research suggests that successful projects require clear principles, extensive strategic and operational planning and mutual respect between stakeholders. It is anticipated that there may be inter-professional dilemmas. Norwich et al. (2010, p. 377), Rose (2011, p. 152) and Vostanis et al. (2010, p. 394) discuss such issues between Education, Health and Social Services in terms of roles, expertise, confidence and control. [refer to Chapter 5, The Insider Researcher, for further discussion of roles].

The role of parents figures centrally within the Code of Practice for SEN (DfE, 2014, b, p. 22). Effective participation happens when it is 'evident at all stages in the planning, delivery and

monitoring of services' and when there are 'strong feedback mechanisms' to ensure parents understand the impact their participation is making. Squires et al. (2007, p. 357) and Humphrey and Squires (2011, 54) reported on parental opinions of 'being listened to'. Effective participation should lead to a 'better fit' between families' needs and the services provided. Local authorities should work with parents to establish the aims of their participation and build trust. They should make use of existing organisations and forums which represent the views of parents – and those which represent the views of children and young people directly – and where these do not exist, local authorities should consider establishing them (p. 22). The following definition of partnership works effectively for this thesis, the themes of mutual understanding and knowledge echoed in previous work (Lyons, 2011).

A working relationship that is characterised by a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and the willingness to negotiate. This implies a sharing of information, responsibility, skills, decision-making and accountability.

Pugh (1989, p. 5).

The term partnership can imply simple parent-teacher-school relationships and may ignore the complexities involved, not least the significant difficulties to achieve a whole school working policy and school ethos. The concepts arising from the study of Lyons (2011) of mutual understanding, partnership are mirrored in this definition. Partnership models between parents and professionals can be viewed as tactical or futile unless they lead to a more 'vigorous exchange of experience and expertise' as well as an awareness of the ways in which claims to knowledge operate within the complexity of power relations (Billington, 2000, p. 67).

The involvement of adoptive parents is essential in the process of determining their needs and in developing service provision for adopted children. The research findings draw attention to the need to raise awareness in school staff about the implications of adoption on education, the need for more effective information sharing, and for collaborative and sensitive working practice. The topics of awareness raising and information sharing have been discussed within previous research concerned with adoptive parents' views of education (i.e. the questionnaires study of Cooper and Johnson, 2006).

Russell and Granville (2005, p. 36) found that patterns of communication, language, cultural norms and expectations pose barriers for parental involvement. Parents become more involved when there is a problem and are motivated by the needs of their own children (p. 22). The study by Roffey (2004, p. 103-5), with respect to the topic of 'partnerships with parents in school', considered the aspects of communications which facilitate more positive interactions and elements of effective listening defined by parents. Many of these are particularly pertinent to this research, including taking family contexts into account; on-going communication; and asking parents about their knowledge, views and what works for them; and the drive towards a 'co-construction of reality'. This is underlined by the findings of Achievement for All: success is seen where parental confidence is developed and a collaborative relationship is formed, involving an open, two-way exchange of information (Humphrey and Squires, 2011, p. 15, 18, 35). O'Connor (2008, p. 255)

emphasises benefits of partnerships. In its most effective form, effective partnerships represent a 'synthesis of collaborative dialogue and shared expertise, combining the professional insight of teachers, educational psychologists and others with the informed social networks of parents, other family members and associated support groups'. The ideal is grounded in reciprocal open cooperation, with accountability for all involved.

Rushton and Monck (2009, p. 102) evaluated, using a randomised controlled trial, the outcomes of parenting advice programmes and manuals [compared with routine adoption support] and reported on the perceptions of the preparation and support received to manage the difficulties presented with the late-placed children. The main problems being addressed were within the areas of aggression, attachment and anxiety. They reported that adoptive parents generally wanted both 'understanding' and 'strategies'. Interventions to enhance adoptive parenting need to enable adopters to discuss and reflect on the coping styles of adopted children and on adapting their parenting skills to specific needs (Rushton et al., 2006, p. 30). Increasing knowledge of developmental patterns can assist in presenting more realistic expectations to parents and carers and tailoring more effective placement preparation and support (Rushton, 2010, p.42).

Findings indicate the need of adoptive parents to express worries to professionals. Relevant to this thesis would be 'caution' in being open to others about problems and 'sensitivity to criticism' and the need to develop trust before being able to make use of support and interventions (Rushton and Monck, 2009, p.102). Adopters stressed the need not to receive advice but, moreover, to work through problems and strategies with a trusted practitioner (p. 95). The concepts of trust and understanding were identified as key themes in earlier work (Lyons, 2011).

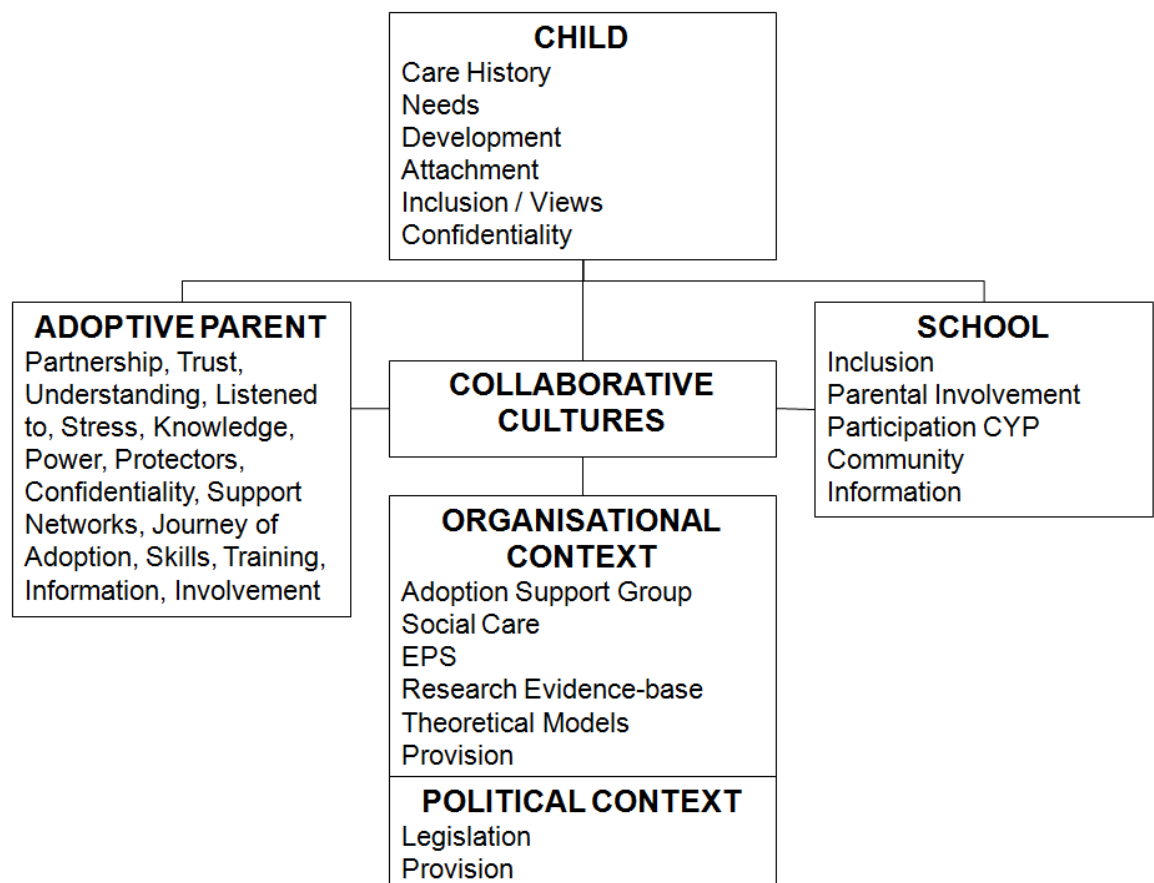
3.6 Conceptual Frameworks

The thesis examines the issues that arise in the communication between parents and school staff from collaborative action research with adoptive parents. It is important to make explicit the process of the development of a conceptual overview which will frame the thesis. Initially, the conceptual framework for the thesis was formed from the study of Lyons (2011) following identification of the themes and subthemes [refer to Appendix 3]. This study set out to explore parents' views of their interactions with school staff and their views on adoption and schooling in general. The study found that for this population of adoptive parents, an overarching theme, 'working in partnership', denoted the positive aspects of communication between parents and school staff. Sub-themes were 'being listened to', 'mutual understanding' and the development of 'trust'. Concerns around the disclosure of confidential information were associated with an identified parental role to protect their adopted children. Parents' roles as 'experts' in the knowledge of adoption and their children, of adopted children emerged from the transcripts. These align with the issues discussed above regarding collaboration. As anticipated, adoptive parents viewed themselves as having valuable information to contribute when working with school staff. The awareness of school staff was considered to be an area of concern to adoptive parents, as discussed earlier in the Literature Review, Section 3.5.3. Planned discussions with school staff were suggested by participants in Lyons (2011). An aspect of the thesis is to facilitate resource development and enable

understanding of the impact of attachment on child development and behaviour as identified by adopters (Bell and Kempenaar, 2010, p. 9; Lyons, 2011, p. 36).

The conceptual framework has emerged following the initial study described above and has developed through the course of the thesis. The active, lived-in and personal and subjective foundation within the thesis is acknowledged. Reflection has shaped the conceptual framework with understanding from prior research projects, the selection of sources and the links made between findings of studies. Emergent perspectives have been synthesised within the defining focus and boundary of the epistemological and ontological stance. These factors combine to lead to a deeper understanding of the issues studied and integrate to form the conceptualisation of ideas and frameworks for the thesis. The presentation of the emerging conceptual framework aims to illustrate and bring together the key ideas and factors involved directly in communicative interactions between parents and school staff and those factors that indirectly affect the contexts. There are many factors influencing parents' communications with school staff and it is acknowledged that any model is not a representation of reality, it aims to represent reality (Bourdieu, 1990, in McNiff et al., 2003, p. 27). The sections of the emerging conceptual framework are an illustration of the factors described above, synthesising prior information, research, personal perspectives, and the epistemological stance, and were guided by the areas developed within the literature review.

Figure 3.1 Emerging conceptual framework



In action research, the conceptual framework is guided by the literature, by the knowledge interests of the research and by associated methodological, epistemological and political dilemmas (Herr and Anderson, 2005, p. 8, 84). Following data analysis, the conceptual framework as a result of this thesis will be presented with a discussion of its elements and their relationships with reference to data. These will be explored, with a view that similar characteristics across the frameworks can be highlighted and synthesised. From the themes, the conceptual framework was subjected to repeated adaption as more data were analysed. To understand the complexity of the context for adoptive parents' communications with school staff as represented within the literature review, the conceptual model [fig 3.1] is proposed, which is influenced by the ecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1993). The framework includes reference to the influences of other dimensions, the political and legislative agendas. In this thesis, the predominant perspectives are those previously discussed pertaining to the context of adopted children, the school / home interaction and parental involvement, set within a social constructivist paradigm [as discussed in Chapter 4, Methodology]. Educational psychologists espouse a range of theoretical perspectives as underpinning interventions and approaches (Fox, 2011, p. 325). Interactionist, transactional and ecological systems frameworks (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1993; Jack, 2001 in Schofield and Beek, 2006, p. 319; Nuttall and Woods, 2013, p. 359) can be applied to encompass different theoretical perspectives. These are synthesised within the epistemological perspective [described in the Methodology Section]. This thesis argues for the influence of social-cultural factors and the interaction between systems, factors supporting the child, family and the school community.

3.7 Summary

The social policy and legislative climate of adoption has been and continues to be subject to major reforms for over a decade (Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2007; Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2004; Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU), 2000). The PIU (2000, for the then Prime Minister's review of adoption practice) stressed inconsistencies between LAs (between 1% and 14% of children in care being placed for adoption). The Adoption and Children Act of 2002 (DfES, 2005, and revised version, Department for Education (DfE), 2011a) and the Act's 'Costs and Outcomes' Research (DfES, 2006; Selwyn et al., 2006) recommend to Local Authorities (LAs) to both increase the number of children appropriately placed for adoption, and to improve the speed with which decisions are made. This recommendation is further stressed by the present government to tackle delays and 'drifts' within the adoption system [DfE, 2012; Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), 2012]. Ofsted (2012) reports that on average, it takes two years seven months before children are adopted after entering care. The average age at adoption is three years and 10 months. The research commissioned within the Statistical First Release (SFR) (DfE, 2011b) reports that 93% of the looked after children (LAC) were adopted due to abuse and family dysfunction. The author's review of the literature suggests that the incidence of special educational needs (SEN) in adopted children is greater than population norms (Lyons, 2010). Outcome studies (e.g. Lansdown et al. 2007; Rees and Selwyn, 2009; Selwyn et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2000) of children adopted from care describe problems within the domains of behaviour, social, emotional, and cognitive development, with associated anxiety disorders, depression and anti-social behaviours, key factors

identified with placement breakdown (Beek et al., 1999). Research is advancing and shaping the theories to explain the difficulties and the potentially complex profile of adopted children (McCrory, De Brito and Viding, 2010; Rushton, 2010).

My development of a professional and personal concern in adoption arose from the role as an educational psychologist within an EPS, from working in schools, experiences as an adoptive parent and as a member of an Adoptive Parent Support Group. Many EPs stated in a survey that, although they felt they had an important contribution to make in this field, they were of the opinion that they would need to be requested by managers of Children's Services in order to make a move into adoption work and thus 'legitimise' their entry into 'social care territory' (Norgate et al., 2008). Previous work explored the constructions of adoptive parents regarding, for example, their communications and interactions with school staff and their views on areas for development within the issues of education and adoption (Lyons, 2011). Issues of 'mutual understanding', 'being listened to', and 'trust' were seen as important within a theme of 'parents working in partnership' with school staff. Parental roles of knowledge 'expert' and 'protector' of adopted children emerged from the thematic analysis. Adoption awareness in schools was considered to be a particular area of concern. Parents' responses indicated feelings of disempowerment and dilemmas were evident between the disclosure and confidentiality of information. The research findings highlighted a need for awareness and understanding in school staff about the implications of adoption on education and the need for more effective information sharing and collaborative working practices among professionals and adoptive families. Although the sample size for the focus group study (Lyons, 2011) did not allow for broad generalisations, the author would argue that the findings provide a descriptive analysis of how these parents view their communication with school staff and the research has provided a foundation for examining more specific questions and areas for the development of communication processes. The findings of Dunsmuir et al. (2004) and Roffey (2004) regarding key factors in the relationship between parental involvement with school staff and positive outcomes for children, support the argument for enhancing collaborative practice with adoptive parents.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is a gap in the literature [and information available via Local Authorities] of supportive procedures and tools for adoptive parents' interactions with teachers and other professionals. For example, the leaflets produced by Stirling LA Post Adoption Central Support PACS (2002) offer an attachment perspective to describe behaviours which may be presented in schools by adopted children. However, the situations and child reactions described by PACS could be viewed as a single interpretation of difficulties. It may be argued that drawing upon many psychological theories, as does the practice of educational psychology, would broaden an attachment profile to accommodate the complex interaction of experiences and developmental influences operating at biological, environmental and psychological levels. Educational Psychologists (EPs) have a distinctive knowledge and skills base for understanding the needs of adoptive children and are well-placed to work collaboratively and proactively within Children's Services to promote improvements in outcomes for adopted children. Professionals in LAs have a duty to understand and recognise the needs of adoptive families and to support the well-being, education and development of adopted children. To summarise, the rationale for this

study is based on the legislative climate of adoption and theoretical perspectives and research within the fields of adoption and education. The researcher suggests a mandate for EPs to seek out the views of adoptive parents and their communications with school staff, explored by the research questions below.

3.8 Defining the Research Problem: The Research Aims and Questions

The concept of communication as used in this research involves me, as an insider researcher, posing questions about the way adoptive parents communicate, share information, liaise, talk with, etc. school staff and then taking action with them to address this issue. The purpose of the research is to evaluate and enhance communication between adoptive parents and school staff. A need has been identified with the parents of the Adoption Support Group to create a 'resource' that is relevant to their needs and those of their children. Thus, a practical aim is to help adoptive parents in their pursuit of a 'resource' to aid their communications with school staff. Overarching aims are to explore the parents' perceptions in relation to communicating with school staff and stimulate professional learning to enhance working policy and practice in this area. The study aims to understand the current climate of information sharing between adoptive parents and school staff and to facilitate collaborative working practice with school staff. The intention is to use action research in order to:

- Identify and clarify the current climate of information sharing between adoptive parents and school staff;
- explore how staff awareness of adoption issues can be enhanced;
- consider how to involve adoptive parents in supporting their children's schooling and in working together with school staff.

Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p. 10) emphasise that multiple action research cycles operate concurrently, with the steps of 'constructing, planning, taking action and evaluating'. The following research questions are organised in a 'plan, do, review' linear format, yet the 'continuous interaction' and 'spiral of steps' which feeds into and shapes how subsequent actions are conducted is acknowledged (Beckard, 1997, and Lewin, 1946/1997, respectively, in Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, pp. 69 and 7).

1 Project Construction and Planning

A collaborative analysis of what is going on for adoptive parents in their communications with school staff, and why. What will be viewed as relevant and important by adoptive parents, by school staff, and why?

2 Design / collaborative action based on shared inquiry

How will the participants generate a *resource* regarding adopted children in order for it to be used as a tool to enable communication?

3 Evaluation and reflection

How will the resource be evaluated, what changes may be required and why?

4 Implementation

What factors will promote change implementation at the school level and at the Adoption Support Group level?

CHAPTER 4

Methodology and Research Design

4.1.Overview

This section outlines and justifies the approaches and describes the epistemology, methodology and methods of inquiry. The rationale is provided for the methodological approach of this research with a review of the relevance of the theory, practice and applications of action research. A constructivist paradigm was adopted to explore the subjective realities of parents. The design, participants and procedures are presented. In this paradigm, the participants are situated within a knowledge community, with shared meanings and constructs. The research considers communications and information sharing between adoptive parents and school staff by exploring the perceptions of parents who attend an Adoption Support Group [ASG].

4.2 Epistemological position

Carter and Little (2007, p, 1316) argue that epistemology, methodology and method constitute three fundamental facets of research which should provide the framework for planning, implementing and evaluating the quality of qualitative research. These are defined as:

- epistemology – justification of knowledge;
- methodology - justification for the methods of the research;
- methods – techniques for producing data and analyses.

'methodologies justify methods, and methods produce knowledge, so methodologies have epistemic content.'

(p. 1320).

Researchers using action research should be 'steeped in the particular tradition they are working out of and the attendant methodological, epistemological and political dilemmas' (Herr and Anderson, 2005, p. 8). In order to justify the decisions around the selection of the methodology, it is important for the researcher to be clear about, give explanations for and acknowledge the beliefs and theories that shape the research and give it its integrity. Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p. 41) assert that epistemology and ontology can be assessed along a 'fairly arbitrary continuum' moving from an objectivist to a subjectivist perspective. Furthering awareness of school staff in partnership with adoptive parents aligns with my ontological and epistemological stance. The thesis aims to analyse the social constructs of adoptive parents and their experiences of communications with school staff. The approach reflects the fact that I and the research participants (both individually and as a group) hold our own interpretations, meanings and understandings, underpinned by commonalities. It is proposed that rather than there being a singular 'reality' whereby knowledge about the research area is defined as true and 'real', knowledge is relative to those who experience and construct it and within particular circumstances. However, it is acknowledged that there may be commonalities and shared views among the participants, given their shared circumstances. The political, social and organisational factors may create norms for the participants. The

participants may have a vision of how they think communication with school staff should be and what constitutes good and not so good practice. There may be particular contexts and mechanisms at play, giving rise to particular outcomes. These factors may constitute shared norms with other adoptive parents in other areas. These statements move my thinking along the objectivist – subjectivist continuum towards the paradigm of critical realism. The concept and understanding of action research, incorporating pragmatic action, aligns with the critical realism paradigm (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010, p. 42). Critical realism affirms an objective reality, but asserts this reality is socially constructed and dependent on mechanisms and context, for example, the experiences and frame of reference of participants. There are parallels with the notion of *contextualist epistemology* (Herr and Anderson, 2005, p. 98) to argue for the appropriateness of the methodology with the experience and needs of the participants.

It is accepted that a researcher influences the research process and constructs interpretations of the findings. This is particularly pertinent within approaches that may demand a different approach to traditional criteria of quality and judgements of reliability and validity. Traditional research operates a distanced approach between researcher and the area or people being researched which would not be a good fit in this context. Tensions would arise between the researcher, the aims, the participants and the setting, should controlled events be imposed. In that context, influences on the data would be seen as causing adverse impact and affecting drawing of conclusions. Instead, I consider participatory methods to be fundamental to maintaining the integrity of the study and the interactions with the participants.

The research can be considered from an epistemological perspective that draws most closely from the social constructivist paradigm, having an emphasis on the exploration of the area of adoption and perspectives, personal and social meanings and on the collaborative nature of learning within the cultural and social context. Participants were encouraged to reflect on their own experiences and discuss their own views and versions of events, consistent with a social constructivist stance. Emphasis is on collaborative learning and the importance of cultural and social context. Reality is socially constructed by and between those who experience it and, thus, is shaped by cultural, historical, political, and social norms (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 85; Darlaston-Jones, 2007, p. 19; Packer and Goicoechea, 2000). The thesis has discussed, in earlier chapters, the political, social, historical and cultural perspectives, which may contribute to these 'norms'.

Qualitative methodology allows for the exploration of parents' views and for the investigation into how parents construct their communications with school staff; thus aiming to fulfill the research purpose. I believe that parents have a significant role to play in the education of their children provided the impetus and drive for the research. The paradigms and belief systems guide the inquiry within a qualitative methodology, in addition to a personal position within the study and in the interpretation of the findings. The use of a qualitative methodology is validated by the aim of the study to develop a collaborative culture of working practice, generated by, directed by and for the communities of adoption and education. Paradigms inform and guide qualitative inquiries:

questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm [...] the basic belief system or world view that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways.

Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 104).

The rationale, purpose, context, and my personal experience and position as an EP and adoptive parent inform the epistemological stance and the development of methodology and methods. I hold the belief that parents have a significant role to play in the education of their children and assert that effective communication processes between parents and schools will facilitate more positive interactions, thus contributing to an improved understanding of the needs of adopted children. This study acknowledges that adoptive parents' constructs of their exchanges with school staff are shaped by interpretations, interactions and cultural perspectives. As asserted by such as Beresford (2000, p. 493), service-user knowledge is inextricable from their experience.

Beliefs and theories shape the processes of the research. The research [detailed in the Rationale] draws attention to the need to raise awareness in school staff about the implications of adoption on education, the need for more effective information sharing, and for collaborative and sensitive working practice. A fundamental belief is that parents have a significant role to play in the education of their children and that effective communication processes between parents and schools will facilitate more positive interactions. The assumed focus of the research is a greater understanding of the needs of adopted children that can contribute towards better educational experiences and outcomes.

The paradigms and belief systems guide the inquiry within a qualitative methodology. The centrality of the personal position within the study and in the interpretation of the findings is acknowledged. The use of a qualitative methodology is validated by the aim of the study to develop a collaborative culture of working practice, generated and directed by and for the communities of adoption and education. The research seeks to encourage interaction and social engagement. The involvement of adoptive parents is essential in the process of determining their needs and in developing provision for adopted children. This study seeks to 'empower' parents, improve knowledge, and provide 'stimulus for action', thus attempting to approach 'tactical', 'educative' and 'catalytic authenticity' (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 114, refer to Section 4.9, for expansion of these terms). With regard to transferability or external validity, the inquiry does not make a claim of generalisability to all adoptive parents' views, but rather that some parallel themes would be raised and, nevertheless, differences *per se* would generate further discussion and hypotheses. I aim to demonstrate how the thesis will be grounded and held accountable by the above criteria. Mason (2013, in Gilling, 2014, p. 62) asserts that in providing insight into issues shared by others in similar circumstances they may illustrate macro concerns affecting individuals. This particular research provides a single action research 'story', a construction of events. Although there may be claims for change and development for those directly affected, it may provide vicarious knowledge for those in similar situations and presented with similar educational and social care challenges. I accept that this is my related experience and construction of events, elicited from adoptive parents' and others' related experiences and constructions of events at that

moment in time in those circumstances. I acknowledge this account is a personal and reflective interpretation and I have attempted to notice and report on bias and limitations. Explicit reference to the perspectives and world views of those undertaking the research is essential:

All different types of human activity produce different types of tacit and explicit knowledge, that is understood and used in different ways by people with very differing ideological and conceptual standpoints to develop theories and empirical statements about the world. This variation creates immense complexity for the evaluation of the quality of different types of knowledge but this diversity can be managed and understood by reference to the world views of those creating and evaluating this knowledge and their reasons for undertaking such judgements.

Gough (2007, p. 226).

Qualitative methodology allows for the exploration of parents' views and for the investigation into how parents conceptualise and construct their communications with school staff. I came to my understanding prior to the research with my own theories and assumptions about the factors contributing to adoptive parents experiences of education. It is important for me to consider that these are affected by the interaction of my role as an EP, my knowledge of attachment and child development. I acknowledge that my [adoptive] parenting experiences and interactions with school staff will have contributed to what I consider to be successful home-school practice. How this aligns with or challenges my professional role as an EP, my status as an LA officer and my worldview as an adoptive parent is explored in the section Insider Researcher.

4.3 Reflexivity

With reference to the qualitative methodology of this project, research should be 'transparent' and sensitive to its empirical and theoretical context, in addition to its sociocultural setting (Yardley, 2000, p. 219). In this research, for example, the sociocultural context includes 'being an adoptive parent' and parental involvement in schools. I acknowledge a personal position within the study in the formulation of the epistemological and methodological bases and in the interpretation of the findings; a position that demands reflexive practice. As discussed by Yardley, the reflexivity of a researcher is a requisite of any research practice remaining aware of its foundation and context. Discussions of researchers' belief systems make a distinction between epistemic reflexivity and methodological reflexivity (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p. 42). Applied to this research, my epistemic reflexivity focuses on my belief systems described above and within the initial Chapters. Methodological reflexivity demands that I am concerned with the monitoring of my impact upon the research setting and focus as a result of carrying out the research. I aimed to be reflexive in how my pre-existing areas of interest may influence my coding of the data. Deductive reasoning, with the initial conceptual framework, based on the underlying theory, existing literature, previous research and personal interests, as presented in The Literature Review, guided the research, while inductive reasoning emerged from the data collection cycles and analyses.

Research carried out by those familiar with the setting or the participants, can be criticised for their focus on empirical data to the expense of due attention to reflexivity (e.g. Alvesson, 2003, p 174). Accordingly, to consider this fully, 'The Insider Researcher' Chapter works systematically with reflection of my insider position as a researcher. As far as is possible, I aim to be transparent and uncover how I claim to hold views and assumptions, and what underpins the decisions I make. Why I choose to follow inquiry in this way; what knowledge I draw on. What I include and exclude. Why I include or exclude particular lines of inquiry, either with awareness or whether there may be other, unexpressed ideas or thoughts. How I challenge assumptions. My reading of the work of Kahneman (2012, p. 80-81) is relevant here, with its exposition of confirmation of ideas and bias. Hence, reflexivity involves my attempts to make explicit my pre-conceptions, my pre-understandings and being alert to my situation within the research process. It was crucial throughout the research process, that I remained aware of my position within the research dynamics of the participants and context. As further discussed in the chapter, 'The Insider Researcher', my multiple roles within the research, my insider access to organisations and systems, and my personal story, pre-understanding and knowledge were potentials for power, influence and interpretation over the process. Action researchers need to pay particular attention to these areas through reflection (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010; Coghlan and Casey, 2001, p. 677; Meehan and Coghlan, 2004, p.412).

4.4 Action Research

4.4.1 Approach and Methods

I hold the view that Action Research [AR] is the method of inquiry that meets the objectives set out above and the criteria for integrity within the research purpose. The practice of action research is defined as:

a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes.

Reason and Bradbury (2001, p. 1)

This definition places emphases on key concepts of participation, democracy, values and practicality. Action researchers argue that understanding and action are not readily separable. Rather, it is argued that only through action is 'legitimate understanding possible; theory without practice is not theory but speculation' (Bradbury-Huang, 2010, p.93). The focus of action research is on resolving of important organisational issues together, in a culture of co-inquiry, with those who experience these issues directly (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p. 4, 37). It demands attention to the following key issues and characteristics:

- It does not distinguish between research and action, instead addressing the theme of research *in* action [rather than *about* action].
- It is an approach to research *in* action to study or resolve a social, organisational issue or problem;

- It works within a cyclical, sequential approach to the co-construction of the problem situation within iterative cycles of construction, planning and taking and evaluating action;
- Participants are actively involved and the quality of participation is evaluated;
- The research moves concurrently with action, thus building knowledge about the problem and contributing towards continuous learning;
- It is an approach to problem solving, applying existing knowledge and capabilities to address practical problems requiring action solutions.
- It involves the collaboration and cooperation of the action researchers and members of the organisational system.

Reason (2003, p. 106) argues that action research is an orientation to inquiry rather than a methodology. It is concerned with the 'emergent deepening' of our understanding of the issues we wish to address and the development over time of 'communities of inquiry'. It is not the intention in the research to view adoptive parents, or their children, as having problems that need fixing. Rather, it is the intention to view the research as an opportunity to explore the participants' views and knowledge of their identified problem situation. Action research represents a 'transformative orientation to knowledge creation in that action researchers seek to take knowledge production beyond the gate-keeping of professional knowledge makers' (Bradbury-Huang, 2010, p.93). Action research assumes that a momentum for change can be created through the identification of a problem situation and by addressing the problem through a reflective, collaborative process of engagement and critical evaluation (Howes, Davies and Fox, 2009, p. 45). As asserted in the Literature Review, EPs work systemically with a problem, acknowledging the processes of socially constructed worlds within ecological frameworks.

4.4.2 First, second and third person Inquiries

In action research, timely action in the present, 'transforming historical patterns into future possibilities, is the ultimate aim and achievement.' Chandler and Torbert (2003, p. 135) explore how action research builds on the past and takes place in the present with a view to shaping the future. They argue that action research offers a rich picture by articulating three 'co-equal and mutually necessary aims of social science research', to support:

- *the first-person, subjective, ethical search for integrity;*
- *the second-person, intersubjective, political search for mutuality; and,*
- *the third-person, objective search for theories that explain large proportions of the empirical variance in human action settings. (p. 148).*

The research narrative will report on the first person inquiry through reflection, learning and introspection. Personal learning cycle activities of experiencing, understanding, judging and taking action will be involved as described by Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p.19). Second person inquiry is represented by the processes of engagement with others in the research cycles. Action research generates second-person data from participants that emerges from their perspectives and realities and can inform their practical learning in action. Third person inquiry moves towards

thinking around explanations for issues and theory development. This also encompasses interactions and impact within and beyond the setting [e.g. Adoption Support Group, Adoption Service, the EPS, the LA]. The knowledge that is generated will be discussed, evaluated, and justified in relation to broader cultural values (Carter and Little, 2007, p. 1322). Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p. 50) stress the relationship between these areas of an action research project and the need for consistency in methodological, ontological and epistemological foundations of the inquiry. I aim to articulate the levels of inquiry above and ground my inquiry in integrity and authenticity through the alignment of the ontology, epistemology and methodology.

4.4.3 Collaborative research practice, empowerment and emancipation

An action research project was selected as I considered it relevant in terms of the organisational context that stimulated the research [the Adoption Support Group, ASG] and my work as an EP to empower and work through others to achieve change. Action research can be defined as an emergent inquiry process, to bring about change in organisations and develop competencies within a culture of co-inquiry (Shani and Pasmore, 1985, in Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p. 4). Action research is 'grounded in a participatory worldview' and is focused on the 'resolution of important social or organisational issues together with those who experience these issues directly' (p. 3, 5).

Questions of emancipation and power have potential through action research approaches to raise awareness, promote social change and stimulate action. Action research, in a traditional form, was conceptualised to respond to problems in social action by its founder, Kurt Lewin who believed that social problems should serve as the impetus for public inquiry within democratic communities and thus necessitated group decision making and commitments to improvements (Dickens and Watkins, 1999, p. 128; Burns, 2007, p. 215). It was based on principles that could lead gradually to independence, equality and cooperation (Kinsler, 2010, p. 172). Although adoptive parents, like many parents, may have limited real control or power over the education of their children, those in the ASG have demonstrated that they have very specific knowledge about their children that they consider is useful to share with staff.

In my previous study, I observed parents' views of information sharing with school staff to include 'mutual understanding' and trust (Lyons, 2011). The themes aligned with Roffey's aforementioned 'co-construction of reality' between school staff and parents. Jones (2006, p. 22) describes this 'ecology' between the environment for parents, including narratives of their roles with regard to child development and well-being, and the narratives that services hold of their functions, powers, values and beliefs and agendas. Arriving at a mutual understanding requires active, collaborative listening from both parties. It would seem to follow that where a collaborative culture exists, with interactions focused on the sharing of expertise, knowledge, responsibility and trust, parents could feel confident, respected, and, thus empowered to support the school in meeting the needs of their adopted children. Findings from Lyons (2011, p.44) indicate the need of adoptive parents to express worries to professionals. Enabling and empowering parents may demand the development of a culture of self-reflection on parental competencies and capabilities on the part of adoptive parents.

It is intended for adoptive parents to participate as partners, and for generated knowledge and practice to reside with and empower this community. A purpose is to effect desired change towards generating knowledge and empowering stakeholders (Bradbury-Huang, 2010, p.93). Empowerment is a key aspect of the epistemological position set out above. Fulfilling the emancipatory intent is asserted as a key research standard, without it action research is an oxymoron (Kinsler, 2010, p. 173). Although, I would not go so far along the emancipatory journey or 'continuum' as to suggest that the study seeks 'social justice' for this group of parents as I do not believe that injustice is the problem. For this research, emancipation is conceptualised with reference to the *a priori* themes of:

- empowering adoptive parents to apply their knowledge;
- enabling their roles as experts and protectors.

It is hypothesised that referencing the themes will empower them in their efforts to take forward their purposes for information sharing and strengthen their position as advocates for their adopted children. This accords with the aforementioned assertion that action research brings about change and develops competencies. Developing a resource for increasing knowledge through interactions generates a community of inquiry within a culture of empowerment. This is consistent with the research position of understanding and constructing the social phenomena of being an adoptive parent and the nuances of communicating with school staff.

4.4.4 Justification of the methodology

Whilst alternative methodologies were considered for the research, such as appreciative inquiry or action learning, action research was selected for this specific research. A previous Masters qualification in Education Management had involved working within an action learning set. Upon reflection, a 'set' approach would demand protracted time and long-term commitment from a select few and I could not have guaranteed their interest nor their capacity. Should commitment wane or be unachievable, the cost to the project would be significant. Action research was considered an ethically and authentically sound way of gathering data in an area where shared understanding and meanings are important. The critical literature on action research highlights the importance of rooting evaluations of the research within its particular ontological and epistemological position (Cassell and Johnson, 2006, p. 806). Action research should be assessed in terms of 'how consensus has been established among stakeholders and the extent to which practically adequate interventions have been implemented which have transformative potential' (p. 807). Specifically, action research was considered fitting for its potential to the following aspects:

1. To maximise understanding of and make explicit the 'insider' and multiple role perspectives held by the researcher in the role of an adoptive parent, EP, LA officer;
2. To promote a collaborative active relationship between the researcher and the members of the ASG;
3. To empower adoptive parents to construct and apply their own knowledge
4. To address the issues within communications with school staff;
5. To provide practical knowledge that will be useful in interactions with school staff.

Action research is distinct from many other types of research that aim to understand and describe an external situation. McNiff et al. (2003, p. 12) describe the features that differentiate action research and relate to its core purposes and values. The following table [4.1] is structured around the defining features that make explicit the justification of the methodology and the corresponding features that are enabled by the action research process for this research. Furthermore, the features represent a deductive synthesis of the organisational, political, social, theoretical and practice issues raised earlier in this and prior Chapters.

Table 4.1: Enabling features of action research for this inquiry

| Enabling features of the methodology of action research ... | ... applied to this thesis: |
|--|--|
| Practitioner based | Joint working with other professionals as EP within LA. Community psychology. Personal and professional learning. |
| Learning focus | Parental knowledge was a key feature of the <i>a priori</i> themes. To enable the development and application of this knowledge. To enable the ASG to develop their learning. To encourage individuals to reflect on and make explicit their perspectives. The outcomes have a focus on supporting communications between school staff and parents and co-construction of 'learning the child' in context. Integration and illumination of theory to practice. Developing a rich picture and multi-layered understanding of issues and perspectives. Application of knowledge of emotional and psychosocial issues. |
| Informed praxis. Good professional practice | Keeping up-to-date with legislation and policy. EP role to work with and through other people to recognise existing skills and develop their personal competencies. Parents are the holders of their information. Parental involvement. Person centred approach. Others' views and feelings are taken into account. Sharing of information. Promotion of inclusive practices. Working across children's services. EP as advocate for children. EPS process consultation approach. Values examined and argued. Confidentiality; information security and data protection. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Personal and social change, influence and improvement | <p>EP role in managing the diversity of views.</p> <p>Parental involvement.</p> <p>Parental empowerment.</p> <p>Respect for people and the knowledge and experience they bring to the research process.</p> |
| Responsive to social situations | <p>Increase in rates of adoption.</p> <p>Changes to legislation and policy.</p> <p>Interface between parents and schools.</p> <p>Recognition of specific needs.</p> <p>Illumination of causal explanations.</p> |
| Demands higher order questioning | <p>Thesis proposal, construction and evaluation.</p> <p>Exploration of complex problems.</p> <p>Refer to later discussions of 'Puzzle or problem' conceptualisations and 'Wicked' issues.</p> |
| Intentionally political | <p>Political as well as practical action to promote change</p> <p>Empowerment of parents.</p> <p>Parental engagement promotes positive change.</p> <p>Emancipatory issues.</p> <p>Legislation and policy changes.</p> <p>LA structural changes.</p> <p>EPS and Adoption Team structural changes and models of service delivery.</p> <p>Advocacy of children who have experienced a potentially difficult start in life.</p> |
| Focus on change and 'the self is the locus of change' | <p>Reflections in action.</p> <p>Development work with parents.</p> <p>Empowering the interaction of parents with school staff.</p> <p>Parents and professionals co-constructing and shaping change together with meaningful communications.</p> <p>Epistemological stance.</p> <p>Participants hold their own interpretations.</p> <p>Knowledge is relative.</p> |
| Practitioners accept responsibility for their own actions | <p>Reflective practice.</p> <p>Ethical practice and boundaries to the research.</p> <p>Ethical clarity for participants.</p> <p>Participation and democracy.</p> |
| Emphasises the values base of practice | <p>Values placed on parental involvement and empowerment.</p> <p>Parental involvement is of value to Children's Service development, to the ASG and to school contexts.</p> <p>Values of opening communicative spaces.</p> |

4.4.5 Concern for practical outcomes

Action research can be characterised in different ways and have different meanings. It is important to distinguish the pertinent meanings for this thesis and how these meanings underpin particular approaches and strategies. The thesis has goals of both changes in ‘action’ and in knowledge (Howes et al., 2009, p. 45), in how adoptive parents can practically support their interactions with school staff, how they are empowered by their understanding and framing of presenting issues by practical support and resources. A distinction between *technical* and *practical* is made by Kemmis (2001, in Howes et al., 2009, p. 44). An aim is to influence and improve practice in functional terms. Yet, this is further enhanced and shaped by considering how these goals are shaped by understanding and reflection in context (p. 46).

Working collaboratively with the Adoption Support Group [ASG] serves the dual purpose of both enabling understanding of the social phenomenon [that is, communications between adoptive parents and school staff] and also of deepening participants’ understandings and leading to some kind of action or advocacy to address the issue (Herr and Anderson, 2005, p. 100). As identified in Chapter One, the research was conducted in response to the study of Lyons (2011) which provided a descriptive analysis of how a focus group of adoptive parents viewed their interactions with school staff. The participants had identified a ‘wish list’ for a resource or guidance around information sharing. Action research was appropriate as the members of the ASG wished to improve some aspects of the system of communication between adoptive parents and school staff. Thus, the action research is guided by a reflexive concern for practical outcomes (Reason, 2006, p. 193). It enabled me to collaboratively work on a real-life and significant problem in the Group and so assist in organisational learning and reflective practice.

Whilst working towards practical outcomes fulfils in part the criteria for tactical and catalytic authenticity, I remained wary through reflective practice that pre-conceived paths of action may confine the exploration of alternative thinking and conceptualisations of the problems area and their corresponding solutions and pathways. The feature of change within action research [refer to Table 4.1, p. 69-70] poses the dilemma that ideas may be generated that may not be useful to the participants themselves. They hold their own interpretations, the ‘self is the locus of change’, with personal and subjective opinions. Participation is stronger within particular aspects of the research. This dilemma is further explored in 4.8, ‘Ethics’ and in Chapter 5, ‘The Insider Researcher’ and how I am positioned as an insider and outsider within the research.

4.4.6 Insider action research position

The insider researcher often embarks on an inquiry from an ‘emic’ perspective, which suggests a subjective, informed and influential standpoint in contrast with an ‘etic’ perspective that is distant and removed from the research (Kanuha, 2000p. 441). In the context of this research, I am a member of the group of adoptive parents which places me in the role as an ‘insider action researcher’. Insider Action Research [IAR] is about undertaking action and studying that action as

it takes place while being a member of the organisation, offering a unique perspective on systems and contextual-based insights (Roth, Shani and Leary, 2007, p. 44).

Assessing my research focus and carrying out an action research project within an organisation of which I am a 'complete member' requires me to clarify my own and the system's commitment to learning in action and the management of roles (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p. 113). The literature on insider AR considers the extent of commitment and focus, along a continuum, of both the researcher and of the system, by what may be termed 'self-study' (p. 103). In undertaking action research in and on the ASG, the commitment to learning by both the system and myself is a useful defining construct. Within the group of adoptive parents, there is a commitment to reflection, to consider their information sharing with school staff, to processes that will help develop understanding and involvement. I am taking an active role in reflection, learning and articulating what is happening. I would not go as far as to say that the research can be fully categorised as 'transformational change'. This would demand additional commitment to self-reflection and knowledge [conceptual, analytic and practical] by the participants. The investment and logistical limits [infrequent meetings or structures] within the Group which directly affect capacity for self-reflection. This is due to limits in the scale of the research, the Group, and its complexity and influence. My personal stake in the research, with the demands of the thesis and in respect to my roles is different to that of others. Chapter 5, The Insider Researcher discusses these with more complexity and reference to specific aspects of the research.

4.5 The participants

In this thesis, the organisation described is a 'group'; a group of adoptive parents that form the Adoption Support Group in this particular LA. I am a member of this group and, thus, may be viewed as a 'friendly insider' thus providing ease of access to a potentially 'difficult to reach' group. This is in contrast to the conceptualisation of an action researcher as a 'friendly outsider' working with a client system (Greenwood and Levin, 1998, in Coghlan, 2003, p. 455). I am concerned with studying ASG members' views of their liaisons with school staff. There is no hierarchy or management within the Group, although it is organised by the Adoption Team, Social Care division of Children's Services. This is an informal group that meets approximately eight times a year for an evening session lasting approximately an hour and a half. Membership is open to any adoptive parent from the Local Authority. Approximately twice a year, a topic selected by the Adoption Team in consultation with the group provides a focus for discussion. This leads to an opportunity to form a naturally occurring action research group.

It is intended for adoptive parents to participate as partners, as those who hold direct experience of the issues, and for generated knowledge and practice to reside with and empower this community. AR literature emphasises involvement of others around shared concerns in a dialogical way to achieve mutual understanding. Fundamental values of AR include respect for people and the knowledge and experience they bring to the research process (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood and Maguire, 2003, p. 15). Integrity with the key tenets of the initial research by Lyons (2011) is

evident. The literature discusses an aim of such dialogue is to open up spaces to engage in political as well as practical action to promote change (Cassell and Johnson, 2006, p. 784).

Participants included volunteers recruited from the local Adoption Support Group [ASG] for focus group activities. Ten members agreed to take part with a final eight attending the sessions. All had adopted children from LA care. Semi-structured interviews explored in more detail, the experiences of a further two adoptive parents. The two adoptive parents represented an opportunistic sample. They were both parents who frequently found it difficult to regularly attend the ASG, but wished to participate in this research. I intended for these interviews to add a contextually rich and indepth picture of the views of participants and provide a coherent narrative of the adoption story for the parents in the context of interactions with school. The approach was flexible, led mainly by the interviewees. They could move the conversation as they wished and emphasise those areas they perceived as important. This is in contrast to the collection of information on the range of opinions within focus groups, producing norms and values that exist within the [adoption] community more broadly (Hennink et al, 2011, p. 111).

It is intended that the resource work could further broaden to consult with other groups in the region. The focus group sessions took place in the usual meeting place for the ASG, the LA central offices. It is noteworthy that, prior to reorganisation of services and austerity measures, the ASG previously met in a small designated building used for the initial training of adopters and the ASG and Foster Care Support Groups. The previous home was small, easily accessible with on-site parking in a room where others could not overhear the discussions. The new home is accessible via a security-guard operated barrier. There are tangible and practical differences in settings. The former both comfortable and discrete, suggesting an atmosphere more conducive for open group discussion. The present group meets within a modern, open-plan setting. In order to maintain confidentiality for the focus group members, a separate room was hired for the specific purpose of the discussions, thus distinguishing it from its usual setting.

4.6 Data collection

Methods of qualitative data collection encompassed focus groups, interviews, questionnaires and documentation. The cycles of problem identification, diagnosis, planning, intervention and evaluation of the results of action informed the development of learning in action and led to further action research cycles. The knowledge gained at each level of the action research process was used to make inductive inferences to lead to further exploration in subsequent stages. The subjective position is acknowledged within the research. The 'participatory worldview' is realised in this inquiry as a 'co-production' (Burr, 1999, p. 160) between me, as the researcher and participants. Collaboration with the participants is present at the level of diagnosis of the problem [from the previous research] and in the development and evaluation of solutions (Bryman, 2004, p. 277).

The numbers 1-4, in Table 4.2, denote the research questions and related phases, yet, it is important to acknowledge the process of 'continuous action' and relationships between different

stages of the project. The phases also represent an overarching action research framework in terms of key tasks of planning, design, evaluation and implementation.

Table 4.2: Research Questions and Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

| Research questions and phases of the action research | Method of data collection | Method of data analysis |
|---|--|---|
| <p><i>1 Project Construction and Planning</i> Negotiating entry and access. What is going on for adoptive parents in their communications with school staff and why? What will be viewed as relevant content and important processes by adoptive parents, and by school staff, and why?</p> | <p>Focus group. Semi-structured interviews. Force field analysis.</p> | <p>Familiarisation. Thematic analysis. ‘Thick description’.</p> <p>Making sense of the data: Describing; Explaining; Engaging in action.</p> |
| <p><i>2 Design / collaborative action based on shared inquiry</i> How will the participants generate guidance regarding adopted children in order for it to be used as a tool to allow information exchange?</p> | <p>Feedback of phase 1 by researcher to focus group. Focus Group to reflect on content, processes and plans for implementation prior to developing drafts; to design and refine guidance.</p> | <p>As above</p> |
| <p><i>3 Evaluation and reflection</i> How will the guidance be evaluated, what changes may be required and why?</p> | <p>Focus Group.</p> | <p>As above</p> |
| <p><i>4 Implementation</i> What factors will promote change implementation at the school level and at the Adoption Support Group level?</p> | <p>Focus Group.</p> <p><i>Further work: School SENCos semi-structured interviews and feedback. Inter-LA feedback.</i></p> | <p>As above</p> |

4.7 Focus Groups

I wanted to encourage an open conversation between adoptive parents about the potentially sensitive issue of adoption. The focus group method was selected to enable participants to respond with safe challenges or affirmations to one another’s statements as well as the focus questions. Discussions are developed, clarified and shaped in this way, a quality which may not be achievable with individual interviews. Indeed, Hoppe et al. (1995, p. 102) cite some evidence which suggests that the ‘safety in numbers’ of a focus group encourages participants to answer questions in more detail than they would divulge in an individual interview. This is particularly relevant given the perceptions that may be raised by my position as both an EP and as a LA officer, perhaps in terms of power, authority and expert roles. Vaughn et al. (1996) in Onwuegbuzie et al (2009, p. 2), assert that through the anonymity provided by a group context, individuals are able to express their

views more candidly and find the experience less threatening. Focus groups can be applied to exploratory and evaluative research which, in combination with other methods, can garner a range of views (Hennink et al., 2011, p. 136/8). They can help understand how people construct specific experiences, the 'why' behind attitudes and behaviours, and are potentially more empowering and culturally sensitive (Massey, 2011, p. 22). It is acknowledged that subjectivity is integral to the process as participants were to present their personal perspectives. They are viewed, in this research, as 'active interpreters' (Carter and Little, 2007, p. 1322) and contributors.

Deductive reasoning, based on the initial conceptual framework, itself based on and guided by literature and research, provided a structure for the focus group questions. The inductive leads from data collected guided further data collection tasks (Hennink et al., 2011, p. 141).

It is important to recognise the drawbacks of the focus group method. Applicable to this research is the restriction on control within a group (Krueger, 1994, in Lunt, 1998, 51). I attempted to manage this dynamic, for example, by providing fixed questions, prepared prompts, varying the response order for participants and non-verbal cues. When the focus group session was in place, I sought to facilitate participation by all group members, to remain aware of 'group think' and conformity (Lunt, 1998, p. 49), dominant personalities, to maintain focus (Hayward and Rose, 1991, in Seal et al., 1998, p. 225) and, thus, to elicit the full range of views held by them in relation to the topic of interest. Including information on dissent can achieve richness in the data, determine 'within-group data saturation' and increase interpretive, descriptive and theoretical validity (Kitzinger (1994, in Onwuegbuzie, 2009, p. 5). The literature on focus groups appears, at times, contradictory in its claim to both identify and consolidate group norms and generate challenge. The key seems to be its quality in creating a safe environment in which to both openly question and move towards shared insights. Training and practice as an EP affords me the interpersonal skills to support and lead groups. I maintained the management and personal responsibility for the 'duty of care' (Hoppe et al., 1995, p. 110) towards participants through ethical practice. Focus groups can be appropriate for generating hypotheses (Lunt, 1998, p. 51). I hold the opinion that within this research area, the development of ideas is pertinent.

The literature indicates the importance of open ended questions to allow participants to express their views as freely as they wish and the need to adapt the level of structure to serve purpose of the focus group (Linhorst, 2002, p. 210). In the case of this research, where the participants have personal knowledge of the area, yet the topic within the literature is relatively unknown, the questions selected were open-ended and simply stated. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 85) note that qualitative research involves a series of questions: the overall research questions, those questions which have been posed in the focus group, and those which guide the coding and analysis of the data.

Structuring the focus group sessions was considered vital in order to maximise the opportunities of having a group of willing volunteer adoptive parents. The framework adapted from McNiff et al.. (2003, p. 58-60) was used to structure the action research elements, personal thinking and discussions within the focus groups [refer to Appendix 4]. Although it was acknowledged that I

would need to be flexible to follow issues as they were raised by participants, a discussion guide was selected to act as an *aide memoire*, a checklist to ensure that key questions or topics were covered (Hennink et al., 2011, p. 141). It provided guiding phrases: What do we want to do differently? It provided 'why' questions, that moved the action research beyond basic problem solving. [Section 6.1.4 discusses an application of the framework checklist].

At the start of each Focus Group, further copies of the information about the research from a [blank] consent letter were given, with assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. The focus group scripts and questions are provided in Appendix 5 and 6. I reiterated the nature and purpose of the research. The recording was started at the outset, while I was delivering these initial reminders and assurances as I felt this would ease the transition into participants feeling self-conscious about being recorded. They were reminded that they could leave at any point and join the other Adoption Support Team representative [usually an Adoption Support Worker], in the usual room used for the monthly ASG. The participants were seated together in a semi-circle with the supporter while I sat or stood with a flip chart as I considered that a visual focus would both aid the discussion and act as an aide-memoire so that participants could see the responses so far. I noted key words or phrases only on the charts due to needing to keep as much positive and encouraging eye contact and body language. The wording on the flipcharts remained the participants own. The participants, being an established group, were able to talk freely. I guided the turn taking of the participants subtly as comments were sometimes interjected, but ensured that everyone had opportunities to give their views. I viewed it important for the discussions that their views flowed easily and spontaneously, without the constraint of strict turns. Continued contact with the focus group participants was achieved by the Adoption Support Team administration due to the confidential nature of addresses and emails. Feedback from the previous focus group was given to act as a reminder, highlight issues, prompt more discussion and additionally to include some participants who maybe had not attended the previous session. They were given monthly reminders of the ASG and the focus group sessions formed a part of this where required. Sometimes, it was clear which date the focus group would be meeting, but as this was not necessarily every ASG each month, then it was necessary to give a further reminder. I did not hold the research on ASG sessions when a particular training event or another information evening was on, such as 'Letterbox Contact' updates.

4.8 Ethics

Ethical procedures are integral to practice as an EP. It can be argued that many of the ethical issues involved in this research did not differ significantly from the day-to-day personal, interpersonal and political issues involved in working as an EP. That is not to say, however, that I am not obligated to critically examine my positions and roles on the ethical standing of the execution of the thesis. Indeed, as Boser (2006, p. 14) comments, it cannot be assumed that good and democratic intentions are sufficient [and, for this research, I would add, nor are training and expertise involved in people-centred approaches]. Thoughtful examination is required of the ethical implications of the research on individuals and stakeholder groups. At all stages of the research, I drew on personal and professional skills and qualities of managing groups, encouraging

participation, reflexivity, self-awareness and trustworthiness. The ethical conduct and culture of EP practice, the skills and experience of working as an EP, and the personal relationship with adoption culture also informed the entry and negotiation stages and the construction, planning, implementation and evaluation of the research. There was no direct contact with children or young people in this research.

Ethical considerations for this research should operate at the level of both the individual, the individual within the LA, the group and the stakeholders. I hold certain ethical parameters within the LA officer and EP role. These values can therefore exist at the systems and personal levels. Values at the systems level inform the ways in which services are designed, developed and evaluated (Freundlich and Phillips, 2000, p. 7). Values recognised at the level of the individual inform the way, I [as a professional, as an EP, an LA officer and adoptive parent] view the needs, interests, rights and obligations of those involved in adoption. The responsibilities of ethical practice such as managing stress and powerlessness are stressed in the literature (e.g. Linhorst, 2002, p. 219). I remained aware of the potential of a power dynamic being employed as an EP by the LA, having initiated the project and holding overall control of the research. I am in the 'dual position' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 94) of an EP and an adoptive parent. Therefore, the ethical conduct and culture of EP practice and a personal relationship with adoption culture also informed the construction and execution of the project. There is an inherent danger here as these are the values espoused within my cultural and ethical context both about those and imposed on those the research aims to empower. My framework of reference with regard to values holds control over the research and may seem to contradict its emancipatory and empowerment goals. This dilemma will be explored within the Chapter Insider Researcher.

Continuous action included keeping up-to-date with changes in Adoption legislation and other topical areas. Throughout all data gathering, participants were assured of their anonymity and their rights to withdraw from the research at any time. All data was transcribed by me to fulfil obligations of anonymity. Walker and Haslett (2002, p. 527) propose the grounding and actualisation of ethical issues within the cycles of action research, by following and by naturally re-visiting them during the process of research.

Approval was sought and granted by the University of Manchester Ethics Committee. The research process was carried out in line with the Data Protection Act, the ethical standards of the EP associated professional bodies (BPS, 2009; HCPC, 2012) and the University of Manchester policies on data protection, security, usage and confidentiality. In addition, as part of my role as an LA employed EP and as a member of the LA Adoption Panel, I undertake regular training and assessment in data and information security. Data and analyses obtained from the research were only used in the ways described and for which consent had been given. Openness and transparency regarding the research and the researcher identity was evident in written and verbal information. Ethics documents, included ethics statements and letters of permission. For example, the consent letter shown in Appendix 7, addressed the issue of informed consent, by emphasising that participation was voluntary and that participants were free to withdraw at any stage in the project. As the very nature of action research is an evolutionary, dynamic and collaborative

process subject to change, this was repeated at the beginning and close of sessions. Ethical procedures require continuous attention.

Statements of confidentiality and consent were reiterated at the outset of each of the focus groups, interviews and Resource development. [Refer to Appendix 5]. A laminated card was placed upon the tables when working in the focus groups and on Resource development stating and reinforcing the key points within boundaries of confidentiality and anonymity. The participants were given a further copy of the agreement they had signed previously. They were requested to re-read it and the confidentiality section was read aloud to reinforce informed consent. The participants were reminded that they were free to withdraw consent and leave at any point. The research formed part but not all of the ASG meetings' agenda. Adoptive parents who did not wish to participate in the research were not prevented from accessing the ASG. A member of the Adoption Support Team was available in another room [the usual meeting area for the ASG].

The participants were assured of anonymity and that other identifiers (names of children, schools, etc.) would be removed and not used in the transcripts, analyses and presentation. As I transcribed all the data, I was able to remove these at source. Complete confidentiality was given and adhered to for all participants. My contact details and those of the University were provided should the participants wish to ask any questions or raise issues of concern. Arrangements were available for participants to talk to someone of their choice [e.g. me, a member of the Adoption Support Team or Social Care] should they have experienced distress or have further questions. No influence was exerted in order to persuade participation or opinion.

Throughout the research, I aimed to convey warmth and integrity. No overt influence was exerted in order to persuade participation or opinion. However, I maintained awareness of the covert influence that could arise from my role as an EP and LA officer. I conveyed my personal and professional skills and qualities of managing groups, encouraging participation, reflexivity, self-awareness and trustworthiness. The ethical conduct and culture of EP practice, the skills and experience of working as an EP, and the personal relationship with adoption culture will also inform the construction and execution of the project. In this context, action research could potentially have personal, group, organisational and political consequences. Action researchers must adhere to 'do no harm' ethical boundaries. Should the thesis action research have failed, I would have sustained the efforts of the ASG to continue the aims and purposes of information sharing improvements. However, I acknowledge that there is a degree of risk involved in making commitments for the future.

4.9 Quality criteria, reliability and validity

Quality, goodness, validity, trustworthiness, credibility, and workability are suggested as terms to describe criteria for good action research (Herr and Anderson, 2005, p. 49). Constructivists view 'truth' or credibility, neutrality or confirmability, consistency or dependability and applicability or transferability to be the essential criteria for quality (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, in Healy and Perry, 2000, p. 121). Golafshani (2003, p. 602) addresses the concepts of validity and reliability within

qualitative research and the generation of what are often considered to be more appropriate terms. Notions such as quality, rigour and trustworthiness, have redefined validity to reflect qualitative conceptions and paradigms. Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 114) propose the use of the following criteria (within their discussion of constructivism) for judging the quality of an inquiry:

'trustworthiness' criteria of credibility (paralleling internal validity), transferability (paralleling external validity), dependability (paralleling reliability), and confirmability (paralleling objectivity)...;

'authenticity' criteria of fairness, ontological authenticity (enlarges personal constructions), educative authenticity (leads to improved understanding of constructions of others), catalytic authenticity (stimulates to action), and tactical authenticity (empowers action).

Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 114)

Furthermore, Herr and Anderson (2005, p. 49) assert that action research measures of quality also need to acknowledge action-oriented outcomes and meet the criteria of 'outcome validity'. To embed the research in its methodology, I have applied further goals of action research and validity criteria as espoused by Herr and Anderson (2005, p. 55). The trustworthiness and dependability of the research was increased by the requirement to provide detailed accounts of the procedures in the submissions to the Ethics Committee with assurances of anonymity of parents, their children and their schools. There were attempts to ensure that my opinions did not exert undue influence over the participants by providing explicit and thorough information in the consent letter, by adhering to the questions script, and by refraining from contact with the participants from the distribution of the letters to the time of the focus group meeting [which was usual practice]. The critique of the findings is discussed in later sections with reference to the criteria of 'trustworthiness' and 'authenticity'.

The application of principles is addressed by Silverman (2000) to inform the validity of studies. In the case of this inquiry, the 'refutability' principal ensured that all views expressed by the participants are considered valid and thus analysed to reflect reality. With reference to the 'constant comparative method', I aimed to refine hypotheses via thematic analysis and through comparisons with other research.

The sample may be non-representative of a larger group of adopters. Membership is likely to remain in place for adults who feel confident to disclose and share worries and, as such, there is probably an evolved selection of active participants. This could impact on the relevance of the research, its credibility, dependability and transferability. Moreover, for the community of adoptive parents, this possible bias could reduce its potential value and benefit.

To increase the credibility of the focus group questions, items were discussed with the course supervisor and were presented to a small sample of two adoptive parents not involved in the focus group. As a result, some alterations were made. I have attempted to increase replicability with detailed procedures of analysis. The consistencies within the coding procedures and rules of the data analysis aim to increase the reliability of 'private meanings' (Weber, 1985, in Squires, *op cit*, p. 6). With reference to how the research may have further application beyond its immediate context,

realistic evaluation of what works, for whom and in what conditions, will be considered within the chapter, 'Story, Outcomes and Discussion.'

The use of Focus Group methodology enabled the participants to express their concerns and ideas in their own words. Terminology specific to adoption was apparent [such as 'Letterbox' – the term for the contact via post of letters, photographs, pictures, etc., between the adoptive family and the birth family]. It may be suggested that the setting within the Adoption Support Service contributed to the use of 'adoption terminology' and served to capture the meaning, nature and authenticity of the discussion. This thesis explores the views of these adoptive parents in this particular context, with a distinct insider researcher perspective.

4.10 Data analysis

My worldview and insider researcher status as an adoptive parent within this Support Group has the potential to both enhance and reduce the quality of the data derived from this methodology. Thematic analysis was considered a pertinent method for the qualitative analysis demanded by this research,

I transcribed the data with re-checks for accuracy. The transcripts were read once without any coding. A second reading generated a set of initial codes and these codes were further refined. The codes were then grouped into themes. Throughout this process, I aimed to keep at the forefront of the inquiry the project intention to increase understanding of the school experiences of the parents of adopted children. Accordingly, in considering the relationship between codes, the question was asked 'how effectively does this code develop understanding of the parents' views' in order to ground and embed the analysis in the inquiry purpose. The themes are illustrated by direct quotations to provide the reader with rich data, show consistency in how themes were developed and articulate how I came to certain conclusions. This course of action aims to justify the search for common meanings. This aims to ensure that the data is meaningful, relevant and valid for those involved.

The narrative is strengthened by leading the reader through the data journey. The thesis aims to justify my interpretations by providing a 'chain of evidence', embedded by the 'thick descriptions' (Squires and Dunsmuir, 2011, p. 122). Due consideration was taken on the use of selected quotations, for example, in terms of their relevance, purpose and contribution to argument. In the choice of examples, I have taken the view that some quotations suffice with short phrases while others require a full response from several participants to enrich the context. Some are used to present counter arguments. The presentation style aims to allow the reader to follow the journey taken in processing and interpreting the data. To enhance the interpretation, and to avoid excessive anecdotalism, the participants' responses are used to illustrate and justify the selection of themes, subthemes and relationships between them. It is an attempt to guide the reader through the emergent conceptual understandings.

Massey (2011, p. 23) aims to clarify the levels of data that emerge from a thematic approach to analysis, proposing that each is relevant and valuable adding to an understanding of meaning from a group perspective. *Articulated* data is defined as the direct responses to the questions. In addition to the expressed beliefs and the reactions to others' opinions, this includes the language participants use to structure their experiences. *Attributional* data derives from discussions that relate to *a priori* theories, hypotheses or research questions. *A priori* specification of codes can help integrate concepts, build on theory, increase the credibility of the research and promote transparency (p.25). My advantaged position allowed me stimulate the conversation among participants in order to increase opportunities for attributional data to emerge (Massey, 2011, p. 26). *Emergent* data contributes to new insights and hypothesis formulation and touches on 'unspoken cultural perspectives and normative values' related to the participants' beliefs and attitudes (p.23), and 'unarticulated normative assumptions' that underlie social behaviour (Boyatzis, 1998 in Massey, 2011, p. 25). This is the data that most contributes to inductively derived themes (bottom-up / data driven) linked with theory generation and is contrasted with the more deductive (top-down / theory or research question led) *a priori* themes of attributional data. It was anticipated that this research, within a relatively unknown area, would include mainly articulated, with some attributional and emergent data, managed by a pragmatic approach. Contextualised theory can emerge from observations grounded in community experiences and the outcomes related back to the community (Bishop, 2007, p.15). Thus, the theoretical framework and methods 'match' the research aims and the position and views of the participants (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 80). The 'pragmatic approach' is stressed by Lendrum (2011) and Humphrey et al. (2008, p. 56) for the production of research findings that are meaningful for future practice, practical and useful' and the selection of data generation and analytic methods on the basis of 'utility and fit-to-purpose'. Pragmatism has a strong constructivist orientation (Gustavsen, 2003, p. 161). With reference to this study, the inquiry sets out to have a 'useful' endpoint. The pragmatic approach contends that the nature of knowledge, meanings and beliefs are best conceptualised in terms of their practical uses.

This research will comprise the analytic tasks of description and thematic analysis at different stages. Description will be used throughout the data analysis process to understand the issues from the perspective of the participants and to develop accounts of events, processes and phenomena in the data (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2011, p. 238). In the main, I sought to use an inductive approach, in contrast to an emphasis on theoretical deductive analysis. Nonetheless, deductive strategies were used as a 'logical starting point' with issues and concepts raised within the literature review (Hennink et al., 2011, p. 219). For example, deductive codes were derived from my previous study, its conceptual framework and the conceptual framework generated following the literature review [Figure 3.1]. Yet, before adding these codes to the study, good quality qualitative research demands that researchers allow the data to 'speak for itself' by taking care not to impose deductively derived codes on the data where they are not validated within the text (p. 219). The approach was in some ways 'data-driven' (Braun and Clark, 2006, p. 83), linking themes identified to the data without explicitly fitting the data into a pre-existing coding frame or pre-conceptions. I view this as more in line with the social constructivist stance. However, it is acknowledged that data are not coded in an 'epistemological vacuum' (p. 84) and that the

foundations of my understandings will impart influence on the analytical procedures. Therefore, theory-driven (p. 88) themes also played a part, as I approached the data with the issues of the literature and contexts in mind. I acknowledge that my position as an 'insider' within the research 'sensitises' me to the data (Hennink, 2011, p. 219), with enhancing and limiting factors, and I sought to reflect on this position and relationship directly as discussed in Chapter 5, Insider Researcher.

The discussion was recorded and later transcribed verbatim by the author, then checked for accuracy. This maintained confidentiality and anonymity and supported familiarity with the data. The transcripts were studied, using the method of thematic analysis, to identify main themes in the data. I used a combination of note-taking, colour-coding and labelling to code, revise and organise the data into themes. Comparisons are made with the literature and discussed in later sections.

Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 79) confirm thematic analysis as a method that works both to reflect reality and to 'unravel the surface of reality'. In addition to applying thematic analysis methods to data, researchers should make epistemological assumptions explicit (Holloway and Todres, 2003, in Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.79) as has been attempted at various points in this thesis. It is acknowledged that the author embarked on the research with a conceptual framework evolved and shaped by professional and personal practice and experience, which in turn informed the nature of the analysis and interpretation. Thematic analysis provided a valuable research tool due to its 'theoretical freedom' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79) and its emphasis on the interpretation of meanings and experiences in the social contexts of school and home. The advantages of thematic analysis are reported by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 97) [see Appendix 8].

The texts were divided into segments of information, the segments of information labelled with initial codes and these codes further refined. The codes were grouped into themes with checks in respect of their reliability. The steps of coding the data led to the conceptual map, an inductive conceptual framework to answer the research questions (Hennink et al., 2011, p. 45). [see Appendix 9 for the process of thematic analysis with reference to this research and see Appendix 10 for the checklist of criteria for good thematic analysis]

4.11 The Unique Contribution of the research

As referred to in the Literature Review, adoptive parents' perspectives within the literature are elicited by means of ratings, interviews and questionnaires. This study differs from previous research outlined as it encourages interaction and social engagement with the topic. It attempts to examine how knowledge and ideas develop within a cultural context and how people 'theorise their own point of view' in relation to other perspectives and how they 'bring evidence to bear on an issue' (Kitzinger, 1994, p. 113, 114). Promoting and developing an understanding of parents' perspectives of adopted children's experiences offers the EP a mandate for contributing to legitimate and meaningful practice between parents and schools. I am in a unique position as an EP, an LA officer, an adoptive parent and a member of a community support group. My perspectives as the change agent of the inquiry offer a unique understanding of some of the issues

in that community and insight to the roles of insider action researcher, the EP and adoptive parent. Thus, the 'Insider Researcher' is enhanced by my position and has been afforded priority with a distinct Chapter, as I believe it to make a unique contribution to the area of inquiry. Yet, it is acknowledged that perspectives will not be representative of the community as a whole.

4.12 Summary

Participants (both individually and as a group) hold their own interpretations, meanings and understandings, and 'construct' their own social realities. These are shaped by many factors, including their membership of this Group and their reflections on their experiences of the educational context of their children. Within the experiential and practical knowing [the APs have direct engagement of the phenomena of and reflection with their experiences of adoption children. I would assert that adoptive parents have their own individual constructions about what they feel is useful and needed to support their interactions with school staff. As Huxtable (2006, p. 9) emphasised, it is the individual only, who can create their own learning and define their experiences; a researcher can aim to 'contribute meaningfully'. I aim to realise the research aims pragmatically and within a cyclical plan of action that is informed by my views and those of others and that is evaluated in this context.

CHAPTER 5

The Insider Researcher

5.1 Introduction

Action research is understood as researchers working with clients and their systems to develop or achieve changes or outcomes intended by the client group in the process of their interactions with researchers. Insider action research is characterised by the action researcher being a member of the 'organisation' being studied, an 'insider' to the client system. Thus, insider action research is characterised by the researcher being immersed experientially in the situation (Meehan and Coghlan, 2004, p. 412). Within definitions of insider action research [IAR], I am termed a 'complete member', with completeness being defined in terms of remaining a member [of the ASG] when the research is completed (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p. 102). As an adoptive parent and a member of the ASG, I am in a unique position to access parental views.

Although many issues face external and insider action researchers, Coghlan (2003, p. 456) stresses that insider action researchers need to pay particular attention to the areas of pre-understanding, role duality and organisational politics. To explore the nature of insider research pertaining to this project, specific areas will be discussed: 'preunderstanding', 'role duality' and 'organisational politics' / 'negotiating access' (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010; Meehan and Coghlan, 2004, p.412). It is acknowledged that these areas are interconnected [Coghlan and Casey, 2001, p. 677]. They will be considered in turn.

5.2 Pre-understanding

Pre-understanding refers to knowledge, insights and experience of the researcher prior to the onset of research [Gummerson, 2000 in Coghlan, 2003, p. 456]. Coghlan [2003, p. 456] applies 'pre-understanding' to theoretical understanding of organisational dynamics and the 'lived experience' of the organisation. This can be considered at different levels: the Adoption Support Group [ASG], the LA, the EPS. The central focus is at the ASG organisation. Insider researchers have knowledge of their organisation's everyday life and language.

They know [...]the everyday jargon; they know the legitimate and taboo phenomena of what can be talked about and what cannot; [...] they can use the internal jargon and draw on their own experience in asking questions and interviewing, [...] and so obtain richer data. They are able to participate in discussions or merely observe what is going on without others necessarily being aware of their presence. They can participate freely, without drawing attention to themselves and creating suspicion.

Coghlan, 2003, p. 256.

I have real life experiences as a member of the ASG. The commonalities of experiences facing adopters build up a picture of what it means to be an adoptive parent. I know the 'jargon' of and the

terms pertaining to Adoption: 'Later Life letter', 'Life Story work', 'Letterbox' contact, 'indirect contact' are examples. The facilitator requires both technical and change process expertise (Fullan, 1991, p. 226), that I demonstrate within my multiple positions. I am familiar with the technical language of adoption and education. I am familiar with the culture of shared and hidden contexts. The ASG is bound by confidentiality; parents do not pry into the children's background experiences, familial details and why they were entered into care. It is important that I reflect on how this familiarity may influence the data collection and analysis. I have an ease of understanding and am already articulate in the 'home language'. I do not have to consider word meanings in addition to the intention of the dialogue. Whilst bias and subjectivity in insider research is inevitable and cannot be ignored, it is necessary to ensure that they do not have a distorting effect (Herr and Anderson, 2005, p. 60). This does not simply mean that stating and accepting bias is enough. I do need to check my interpretations of the data, of the participants' intentions. Checking out the narrative so far with participants sought to clarify if this was a representation of what went on within focus groups. Meetings with the supporter within the Adoption Team served to gain a response to the work. Speaking the language of the multiple contexts [LA, Social Care, ASG, EPS] helped to garner interest and maintain credibility among the stakeholders. These strategies helped me to reflect on my understandings over time. There is a need to acknowledge the different types of discourses that may be expressed in the 'private' and 'public' arena, or with peers versus with an interviewer. The fact that particular group contexts facilitate the articulation of particular kinds of perspectives needs to be consciously addressed in order to consider its importance and relevance (Kitzinger, 1994, p. 117).

I have a working knowledge of the formal processes of becoming an adoptive parent. [This moves through the stages of considering adoption as a process of family creation, moving through approval, initial matching with children and the day-to-day living experiences]. For the ASG, these also include the initial membership of the Group. Being approved as a prospective adopter follows training processes and personal / family analysis / scrutiny]. I know from 'living' through and completing the training and approval, how this serves to prepare [as far as is thought possible] the adoptive parent. I know how family systems are scrutinised for an analysis of capability and capacity for bringing a child into a family. This knowledge encompasses the range of experiences adoptive parents reflect, from feelings of self-worth when accepted as a prospective adopter to feelings of uncertainty when some prospective adopters have had a more difficult trajectory towards approval and their suitability has been questioned.

As an insider action researcher, it is important to remain mindful of making assumptions about my knowledge when considering focus group or interview questions, when using prompts to elicit further knowledge. Coghlan [2003, p. 256] stresses the importance of 'exposing current thinking to alternative reframing' and engaging in critical reflection.

Intended change in an action research project may involve 're-education' (Titchen and Binnie, 1993, in Coghlan and Casey, 2001, p. 675). In this case, the term may be refined to refer to developing patterns of action and conceptualisation. It is associated with the development of an information sharing resource in this context. Knowledge may relate, in particular, to fact-finding,

but includes free thinking and choice to engage in new kinds of action based on pre-understanding. This is congruent with the notion of re-education, in engaging participants in learning and change. However, this is characterised by change that they are in control of, that is personal and group-based, but not imposed by my vision of how things should be done. They may become more reflective and aware of their roles in collaboration with school staff, which, in turn, may involve educative influence. Participative methodological approaches may challenge the status quo and traditional notions of practice. There may be opportunities to influence personal and group transformation.

5.3 Organisational politics and negotiating access

Engaging in action and reflection can be threatening to existing organisational norms (Coghlan 2003, p. 457). Pre-understanding has direct links with organisational politics. My insider knowledge meant that I could act in a 'street smart' manner and be able to get things done (Roth, 2007, p. 52). This probably assisted me considerably when I made the decision to re-negotiate access due to management changes in the Social Care structure. I accepted and needed to embrace my organisational position of influence as an EP, member of the Adoption Panel and LA officer, in order to re-secure access at the initial stages. This demanded working the politics of the system, while maintaining credibility (Coghlan, 2003, p. 458). My position as an EP and LA Officer most likely influenced the manager to grant me a meeting to discuss the proposal. Knowing the organisation as an insider meant I had clarity and could be directly political, exploiting a position of credibility and power, in how the project would proceed. Power and responsibility are unavoidable issues in action research (Hilson, 2006, p. 32).

The organisation in this study can be considered on different levels: the Adoption Support Group [ASG], the LA, the EPS. The central focus is at the ASG organisation. I needed to elicit the ASG's justification of what it wanted from the project. Since I am present at each ASG meeting, I am able to see cultural change as a 'continuing conversation' over time (de Guerre, 2002, p. 332), one that continues whereas outside researchers would not be present. As an adoptive parent, I have the opportunities to gain insight which is not available to outsider researchers. As an EP and LA officer, I am afforded insight to LA and national issues. I am aware of the rapidly changing climate of adoption.

As my attendance is regular due to personal and professional interest, I have a fair knowledge of the group members. I am aware that some attend when they have reached a crisis point, or have a particular objective-driven goal of seeking information or support. I know how the members use SWs in attendance for knowledge or support. In turn, I am consulted by the staff and members of the group who are aware of my profession. I am able to participate freely at a level of general discussion and, yet, can observe what is going on.

The work on managing change is informed by my previous work as a Deputy Headteacher and an MSc in Education Management. My broad educational background and organisational experience

are strengthening opportunities for this research. I have worked within the LA for many years as a teacher, deputy head and EP and have historical connections and organisational knowledge. As a practitioner-researcher, as an educational professional, and particularly as an EP, enquiry and evidence-based practice is integral to roles. Practising as an EP, is a role that that demands, among other things, managing change with other people and problem solving to find solutions. Within the LA, I am in a privileged and often unique position of synthesising research outcomes into potential for educational practice. What presents as fundamental to this study is recognising and exercising the challenge posed by Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p. 124):

[to explore] the forces whereby you are enabled or inhibited in exercising both your organisational roles and your insider action research role are key to first and second person inquiry and practice.

5.4 Multiple roles, boundaries and conflict

Insider researchers need to manage multiple roles that can raise conflict in moving towards achieving goals (Roth et al., 2007, p. 51). Roles can be associated by others with specific individual professions and individuals, who are labelled accordingly. Thus, in this Research, I am labelled as: EP, AP, LA officer, member of ASG. A role boundary refers to whatever delimits the perimeter and, thereby, the scope of the role and are bounded in 'space and time' (Ashforth (2000, p. 474), location, role set members and role status (475). The research demanded self-awareness of how my roles influenced how I viewed the area of adoption. How I perceived adoptive parenting, how I am perceived by others.

A challenge faced by insider researchers is how to operate successfully within each role (Roth, 2007, p. 51). Applied to this research, each role can enable different aspects of the research. In combination, the roles can release mechanisms and outcomes that may not be possible as, say, an adoptive parent standing alone, trying to negotiate LA systems and stakeholders. Although I consider myself to be warm and friendly, I maintain role boundaries, conduct myself in a professional manner and do not socialise with members of the ASG or LA. This protects my professional space and boundaries. I have acted in this way from the outset of my attending the ASG. Did the onset of the research bring about a significant change in my demeanour? Not noticeably, however, subtle changes may be those of personal attributes, such as feelings of confidence. During the course of the research, I have been requested to undertake training to become a Panel member in order to participate in the meetings of the formal Adoption Panel, which makes decisions, among others, regarding the approval or otherwise of prospective adopters, the 'adoption in the best interests of the child' decision and the matching process between adopters and children. It is not known whether it is viewed as a 'covetable' position. This appointment does set me apart from the majority of adoptive parents and brings me closer to other adoption structures and personnel.

There can be inter-professional dilemmas between Education and Social Services in terms of roles, expertise and control (Norwich et al., 2010, p. 377; Rose, 2011, p. 152). SWs make direct reference to my EP role [or what is perceived by them as an EP role, i.e. general SEN issues], sometimes stating: "You know about this. What do you think?" That statement implies I have

influence on the Group or the Adoption Team. With this comes the opportunity, but added responsibilities. It is the insider who is the 'primary bearer', the 'principal agent' holding responsibility for the research project (Williander and Styhre, 2006, p. 241-2). Others' perceptions of me can be influenced by role references. I am sometimes at risk of 'wearing too many hats' (Holian and Brooks, 2004) and role conflict can emerge.

My attendance at the ASG over time has served to build up knowledge of the topics of conversation acceptable within the group, which can range from members' lives with their adopted children to unrelated topics. I aim to foster authentic collaborative relationships, based on my working practice of consultation. I seek to be reflective in my thoughts. As an educational professional and the researcher, I can experience a level of frustration with unrelated, 'off-topic' conversations. How are my feelings reflected in my behaviour? I recount some reflections from my research diary at the time.

"I am feeling frustrated because the topic of conversation has strayed from adopted children to random areas. [This is not from the parents themselves] . I am thinking that we need to get back on track to our purpose of being there. I am picking up signs of frustration from others that they possibly want to move on, but from others, there is a sense of comfortable, easy chatter. Do I steer the conversation back? Sometimes, I do. Do I back off, maybe leaving it to the Adoption Social Worker or Support Worker present? Sometimes. Or do I do nothing? Sometimes.

Questions are raised about whose talk is valid. I think that enabling open discussion and the emergence of ideas, does mean that sometimes I had to accept that all talk was equal and valid. However, the group belongs to the parents and if I sense that they are becoming frustrated by another person [in this case, a SW, with a different remit] then perhaps I do need to steer discussions back, as gently as possible. I am aware that different Social Service personnel [on a rota basis to attend the ASG] view the sessions in different ways. Some have focused discussions. Others allow 'chat to flow freely'. Differences change the dynamics of the Group and impact on sessions I use for research. This may raise several questions. How does the type of session affect the participants? Do the participants express, albeit hidden, a preference over how the sessions are governed? Does the behaviour of the participants suggest dissatisfaction with arrangements [attendance, involvement in discussions, perhaps steering discussions].

Having a lack of focus could in itself be a constraining factor, perhaps even to have consequences on Group membership and maintenance. I sometimes felt that I needed to protect the project for the purposes of the Group, its integrity, its ethical duties and to see it through. Keeping on task could encourage confidence from others that I will 'get things done' within the core action research problem. Nonetheless, I am conflicted as indeed, the process of open communication means that members need to feel comfortable to discuss varied topics. If I step in, that changes the dynamics in the group; my agenda becomes the one that counts, I assume a role as a 'leader' and that could be detrimental to future discussions. Multiple role identity both complicates and focuses the research project (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p. x). I drew upon my boundaries of ethical practice in research. What is required of me by others in this research? I am obligated to the ASG, yet,

does that demand that I am entrenched in their world? I aimed to maintain integrity within my position as an EP. Such situations pose more dilemmas for acting as an insider than are possible to resolve. As Coghlan (2003, p. 457) observes, 'action research examines everything: it stresses listening; it emphasises questioning; it fosters courage; it incites action; it abets reflection.'

Taking a position of responsibility for these types of issues, stepping out of my adoptive parent role, into my EP / research role and taking charge, would be to take a lead. I consider that to act out of my member position, of the Group world. Humphrey (2007, p. 23) discusses the perils, the contradictions, the personal, professional and political dilemmas of journeying between different life-worlds occupied by the insider researcher and convinces the reader to 'activate the hyphen' [insider-outsider]. Take charge of the hyphen rather than become 'hostage' to it, to cross and bridge the various worlds. She makes reference to the reflexivity demanded by a researcher, noting the Latin roots of the word 'to bend back upon itself'. As I am on equal status and seek to remain so with adoptive parents, I do not seek a hierarchy, a privileged position. That is not in keeping with the way I am as a person. I feel I am no 'better' than others and that I do not know more than others. That would also be counter-productive to the research. To counter any feelings others may have about me and positionality, my facilitation style is purposefully low-key. I enable open discussion, do not push my agenda and gently nudge focus questions back if off track. I aim to do this without making others feel that they have been talking about irrelevancies; I do not feel that would be conducive to allowing them to express their feelings and would not wish to offend. I aim for respect, encouragement and prompting. Establishing communities of inquiry is a challenge for researchers. Research is often characterised by a one-sided relationship; an 'us and them' culture. A 'condescending' culture, as it is still possible to be 'nice, respectful and condescending at the same time' with condescension coming from the position that 'we' relate nicely to 'them' (Eikeland (2006, p. 42). That 'we' can have a dialogue with 'them'. Eikeland reframes the question: 'how should we relate to the others who are not researchers? To: how should we relate to each other? Conversely, operating as an insider brings a real opportunity for inclusive research, however fraught with dilemmas and contradictions between 'worlds'.

I genuinely believe that adoptive parents want the best for their children and by encouraging an open dialogue, can support them in developing their thinking around their own ideas. The situational dynamics of the group allowed the free flow of concerns and feelings of dissatisfaction. This allows for data that is authentic and truthful; that has integrity for the participants. Within such situations, I affiliate with the role of adoptive parent, albeit with a slight 'outsider' position to enable the momentum of the research. Although I experienced some feelings of detachment from the EP role, as I tried to remain open to the authentic experiences of parents without 'inside' education knowledge, the role of EP was in the more dominant position due to its focus and connection to me and the research.

The collaborative process of critical inquiry between the insider researcher and the participants gives rise to ethical dilemmas, including participation over time, influence, power imbalance and coercion. My role as an EP and LA Officer has the potential to create a power relationship between the participants and me and also, within and between the Adoption Team and me.

The relationship between the Adoption Team and the EP has its own evolving narrative. Prior to my involvement in the area of adoption, and my being the Specialist EP for adoption, there had been no previous discussions held on the topic. The Social Service staff use my background and role as an EP to consult with over school and child development issues or concerns. This consultation takes the form of a focused discussion with a parent and a SW or Officer if the SW has identified me as having an 'expert' knowledge of the issues and having 'inside' knowledge. This may mean that I am requested to move to an area with the SW and AP, away from the ASG, to allow for a short confidential discussion. It is important to acknowledge that these conversations will shape the understanding I bring to the issues within the research. When members speak to me 'in confidence', it appears to be their view that they are talking to me as an EP, albeit, 'off duty'. I do preface discussions with a brief disclaimer: "I will keep confidentiality". As this approach means taking on a role which demands different language and behaviour to what I would normally use, I may add, where appropriate, "As an EP, we work over time in a problem-solving way with the significant people in the child's life, so I may not be best placed to advise you in this..." and advising them to raise a concern with school staff. Issues of role boundaries under contrasting conditions are raised.

Fallon et al. (2010, p.1) reviewed the changing and dynamic role of the EP and considered others' relatively less well developed understandings of the EP role. Others' misunderstandings of the role or lack of knowledge of the role, places me in a somewhat vulnerable position. EPs often question their roles and practices and how they can translate their work for the benefit of others. I also needed to question why I perceived that others did not understand my role. It could be defensiveness on my part. I am exposed due to my operating alone as only one EP within the research. I would also hope that my responses are not dismissive, yet are open to argument, show humility and respect for others' opinions and ways of doing things. Do they 'not understand' any more than a colleague in another service may not understand. Does it matter? Probably not, I would conclude as long as I continue to work ethically, reflexively and professionally.

My aforementioned roles are more relevant in certain physical locations. Previous to past year, the ASG has been 'housed' in some LA Social Care Team buildings. The Group now assemble on the ground floor in the new composite LA building where the EPS are on the fourth floor. Among other issues raised [and considered in another section], the building is one in which I am familiar. I am afforded access via routes in / out and within the building itself. That could place a 'stamp' of identity and reinforce my role as an LA Officer and EP. Flexible boundaries would work across settings and times. Conversely, inflexible role boundaries in terms of how an EP acts [in view of confidentiality, information known and not known, how we work with others, etc.] restricts [and, rightly so] the possibilities for 'permeability'. Ashforth (2000, p. 474) defines pliability and permeability as the degree to which a role allows one to be physically located in the role's domain, but psychologically and / or behaviourally, involved in another role. For example, my roles can potentially exacerbate conflict by creating confusion among the members of the ASG. I may purposefully make my boundaries impermeable by my behaviour. Inflexible behaviour would be characterised by my adherence to certain personal boundaries, selecting when to engage with others, when to enter one world or another. I may be restricting my access to others and the data

set. Yet, there is a clear advantage in consciously activating the aforementioned 'hyphen' as long as I remain aware of crossing domains. The flexibility and permeability of role boundaries may ameliorate inter-role conflict by enabling the individual to undertake a role transition when necessary (p. 474).

Role identity refers to the specific goals, values, beliefs, norms, and interaction styles (Ashforth, 2000, p. 475). Role identities are socially constructed definitions of 'self-in-role' with core [typical to the role] and peripheral features (p. 475). Transition and potential difficulties of 'switching cognitive gears' (Louis and Sutton, 1991, in Ashforth, 2000, p. 475) demand the disengagement psychologically from the identity implied by one role and re-engaging in the dissimilar identity of another role (p. 475).

I am aware that my personal inclusion with the adoption culture and my relationships with the participants sensitises me to aspects of the construction and execution of the study alongside the data gathering and analysis. It was important that I validated deductive codes to ensure that I was not imposing them; rather that they were actually evident in the data itself. It was important that I was explicit in demonstrating how I analysed data. It is acknowledged that knowledge and experience could potentially 'block' me from recognising new or unexpected issues in the data by anticipating the presence of certain issues (Hennink et al., 2011, p. 220). Furthermore, participants may have veered towards a problem focus and thought I wished to gather more negative information. As an insider to the ASG, they may have vented more freely which may have affected the data I collected.

As an educational psychologist, utilising a consultative approach developed and applied within my Educational Psychology Service, I am familiar with these issues presented within the literature on consultation. Consultation approaches in my EPS emphasise the skills and processes in addition to knowledge to aid and facilitate clients to work towards their own solutions to their concerns [problem-owner]. I am also aware that some criticisms of action research approaches are centred around consultation, specifically that the method is an 'amalgam of uncritical consulting that leads to the reification of power relations in organisations' (Bradbury-Huang, 2010, p. 97). Power dynamics exist. These can range from formal structures to more fluid work areas. However, they can also be subtle in form, hidden [as I have intimated in other sections of this Chapter] akin to the JoHari window quadrant or attributed to, for example, personal features (age, sex, presentation). There is no point in being unrealistic in developing empowerment approaches and, it could be argued, limited action would take place should power structures be dissolved.

This brings to mind the contrast between the ways of EP working using problem-solving and process consultation, to work collaboratively around the people around a child over time, with established working relationships, access and role definition within the EPS as part of the LA. This can create role conflict and identification dilemmas [Coghlan, 2003, p. 257]. [The EP uses knowledge and skills of the model of process consultation to shape discussions rather than an expert model, but may find this context leans towards expert medical model and information delivery. Indeed, others may view the EP as operating a medical model]. Thinking around this

topic of roles would suggest that there is a need for me to further clarify my role to the ASG when leading on the focus groups, etc?

They need me to attend to their unique position and I aimed to be careful about how much I shared about my context. It could be 'demoralising' (Kaniuk and Fursland, 2010, p. 30) for participants to hear my stories, positive or negative. Too much and I would feel that I was invading their platform; as I am already in a position of control within the research. I needed to attend to their experiences. Yet, I reflected, disclosure may bring me closer to their 'world', build trust and confidence. Taking risks in disclosing personal information may indeed 'activate the hyphen' and strengthen the bridge between worlds. I chose disclosure bound by safe parameters. Situations that did not place me in the role of 'expert', but placed me as experiencing similar issues.

The role of the researcher can be conceptualised as acting as a 'bridge' between research and practice (Williander and Styhre, 2006, p.247) and between research and literature themes [for example, adopted children, legislation, education, interactions between school staff and parents]. This is not to say that The Adoption Team Social Services members who run the support group and the adoptive parents do not hold knowledge in these areas. For this research, I understand the bridging roles of the insider researcher to include sourcing knowledge, clarifying knowledge, translation and integration of the themes. The Adoption Team Social Workers had sourced some information sharing examples to bring for discussion with the researcher. However, I have greater access to and experience of academia and research due to both the nature and practice of the profession of Educational Psychology and the Doctorate Programme. This is tacit knowledge expressed by the SWs "With your name on .. people would want to come".

5.5 Summary

Ethical concerns in organisational research arise from issues associated with roles, and that ethical dilemmas often arise 'not because roles are unclear, but because they are clearly in conflict' (Holian and Brooks, 2004). It is through reflection in writing as well as doing that I become increasingly aware of my own pre-conceptions about others 'misconceptions'. This section has explicitly addressed the insider researcher position integral to this thesis. Evidence has been shown of how I have challenged and tested my own assumptions and interpretations throughout the project. I have acknowledged the challenges and opportunities afforded by this insider dynamic and address the inevitable bias within the research.

CHAPTER 6

THE STORY, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research narrative will report on the first person inquiry through reflection, learning and introspection of the researcher and the personal learning cycle activities of experiencing, understanding, judging and taking action will be involved as described by Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p.19). Second person inquiry is generated in the course of interactions with participants and the data that emerges from their perspectives and realities to inform their practical learning in action. Third person inquiry moves towards thinking around explanations for issues and the generation of knowledge and theory.

To evidence the levels of inquiry above, this Chapter attempts to capture and provide the narrative, to present themes and to consider overarching issues. While being engaged in shaping and telling the story, I need to demonstrate the extent to which the story is a valid presentation of what has taken place and how it is understood (Coghlan and Coghlan, 2002, p. 237). Firstly, I tell the action research story and relate its development. By narrating the processes and contextual factors, challenges, points of interest and reflection are raised and the process of research *in action* is demonstrated. The narrative is structured within the phases which reflected the research questions. There follows a discussion of the emergent themes that are central to the research findings on adoptive parents' communications with staff. Direct quotes from the participants contextualise the findings. The focus moves to an examination of the developing Resource. Finally, the research is examined with reference to realistic evaluation, reflections on participation, quality, authenticity and trustworthiness.

6.1 PART ONE: The Action Research Story

Stories are a way of representing action research. They tell the processes of coming-to-know.

McNiff et al. (2003, p. 27)

This narrative represents the broad, overarching phases of the action research, whilst within-phase or sub-cycles provide further details of challenges and reasons for actions. The phases reflected the research questions and these are briefly stated within each title. Continuous action throughout the research included keeping up-to-date with local issues, changes to Adoption legislation and policy and any other pertinent areas. While engaging in the cycles, I am 'standing back' from the action, also engaging in my own learning cycle activities of experiencing, understanding, judging and taking action. Text boxes are used to explain my reflections at strategic points in the research, [to 'freeze' this narrative], to give reasons for my behaviour and thinking or to expand on an ethical issue there and then. Thus, this attempts to mirror the practice of research *in action*. I include 'live' evidence to represent how I exercised my influence and came to my decisions. The aim is to punctuate the writing with first person authenticity (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p. 147), and

second person research, illustrating how ideas in development relate to mine and others' thoughts and actions.

6.1.1 Negotiating Access and Entry: the pre-step phase of action research

From the time of preparing the Thesis Proposal to the writing of the Thesis, I searched and read background information on the areas discussed in the Chapters, 'Political, Social and Organisational Context' and the 'Literature Review'. I collated existing methods and forms of information-sharing documentation between parents and school staff, in non-adoption areas, such as 'All about me' booklets and plans for children with specific needs such as autism. I negotiated access and secured entry to the research area, stakeholders and participants with a presentation of the research proposal to the EPS leadership and to the Managers of the Adoption Team. I enlisted a supporter, a Social Worker from within Adoption Team who would enable contact with adoptive parents and act at the interface between Adoption and the research.

Efficiency and cross-cutting programmes are changing the face of LAs. Personnel have been reduced in both the Adoption Team and the EPS [with some staff required to reapply for posts, of which I was one]. The severity of the cuts to health, education and social care are keenly felt in this area of the UK (Butler, 2013). This authority is ranked within the ten most deprived LAs. The structure and management of the EPS has also been transformed. Due to EPS constraints and recruitment problems, I conducted all research, analysis and writing outside of work time.

The climate of interest is also affected by the strategic review of Social Care in the LA due in part to Child Sexual Exploitation. The LA is exploring with other neighbouring LAs the merging of services due to 'Regionalising Adoption' initiative. This has implications for the present Team managers and structures. This may also represent an opportunity for the research outcomes to reach beyond the immediate LA context.

Issues within this early stage necessitated re-visits to ensure access, permission and authorisation. I wished to focus on long-term aims rather than satisfy immediate needs and find that the project was vulnerable to failure. As I was operating within my own time, I had flexibility to allow me to proceed with re-negotiating access. For the longevity of the findings and the 'Resource tool', it was important that current management had knowledge of the research. In this way, the manager would have something to refer to when the project was raised in the future and would be more likely to pay attention to and endorse. Speaking the language of the LA was important to maintain credibility and interest of stakeholders. As discussed in further detail below, the research would not reflect values of trustworthiness and authenticity, should it not be officially sanctioned by stakeholders. I felt it was crucial to establish from the outset that I was trustworthy and had integrity. These issues needed to be visibly demonstrated by my statements and through my behaviour. First and foremost, I am an employee of the LA, albeit conducting research in my own time, I am using, maybe sometimes exploiting, my role and influence. My ethical practice sought to be professionally, personally, academically and responsible.

This has raised issues for this thesis, not least affected delays on the timetable. In order to move on with the thesis area and work with the Adoption Team and the ASG, I needed authorisation from the Adoption Manager. I had previously gained this at the proposal stage for the Thesis, but was required to repeat the request when the Manager was replaced following reorganisation. In keeping with ethical and professional boundaries, I had not requested ASG participants for the research until full approval and access. The Thesis demands collaborative working partnerships and an internal 'supporter' within the Adoption Team, who would 'allow' access to the ASG. Again, there was a change in personnel. Although the social worker I originally liaised with had to withdraw from acting as my key contact due to her changing role, she did agree to pass on the details to the Team. I re-visited the Team to explain the action research plan and to seek a supporter. I enlisted another supporter who was open to my work and facilitated some of the on-going access to the Adoption Team, and the ASG as a researcher and EP [I already had access as an adoptive parent].

The supporter had an interest in the research and showed commitment and motivation to maintain involvement. She demonstrated a personal conviction that things could be better between adoptive parents and school staff from her personal examples of recent visits to schools to discuss specific issues regarding recently placed adopted children. I considered this SW to empower me to conduct the research with another Service and to give her 'insider' perspective of the organisation. This was vital for pragmatic purposes to allow formal access to the ASG, the sharing of information about the thesis, and to set aside some of the ASG sessions for the purposes of research. The supporter showed empathy for the adopters and familiarity with their day-to-day experiences, enabling authenticity. However, the supporter was not one with management influence; that was not possible given the many structural changes within the Team. A manager would have brought a different, not necessarily a better perspective. A manager may have a certain influence to make projects happen and may have learned more about adopters' experiences to inform other processes within their service. Yet, a manager may be removed from the minutiae of the adoption journey narratives. The nature of the research demanded a culture of transparency, openness and trust. These qualities may have been compromised by someone acting in a stronger political and strategic position of power.

To summarise the pre-step phase, momentum was lost close to the beginning of the project due to the re-organisation of the Adoption Team and the loss of a prospective supporter. These delays amounted to approximately seven months and resulted in some returns to the early stages of problem identification and negotiation. During this time, further opportunities to garner links to key staff were established with a position on the Adoption Panel as an independent member. Establishing a link with the newly appointed Manager was facilitated by this membership. A further change in management took place early in 2014. Management has seen further changes and Social Services inspections have impacted on structures. Repeat authorisation was necessary, not because it was requested by Social Care, but because I felt it appropriate for the ASG and for the integrity, transparency and stability of the research. However, this behaviour was not simply about doing my best for the research, it reflects how I continue to behave as an EP, with strong ethical

boundaries. Negotiating access with others, in maybe superior roles or in other sectors, can be difficult, particularly when the project aims at useful work and not something bland (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p. 124). Situations such as these illustrate the many demands of the cyclical process of co-inquiry (as affirmed by Humphrey, 2007, p. 22).

Therefore the approaches to mitigate the challenges were to establish the stakeholders who were able to validate, support and give permission to the research. Those in positions of management were able to make the decisions for me to proceed. This was in contrast with the supporter, who acted as a day-to-day contact and interface between the ASG and me and, as the project moved on, was able to continue as a contact to the stage of producing the resource. Keeping allies close was important for the feasibility, momentum and authenticity.

Negotiating access within the 'pre-step' stage, in my view, parallels the initial stages of consultation approaches used by many EPs: in terms of, stressing the importance of establishing relationships; securing entry to the context; and, setting boundaries from the outset for problem sharing and identification. A weakness in this area could have compromised the future robustness of the research. As stated above, action research demands personal learning cycles of experiencing, understanding, judging and taking action. Making a judgement to make this course of action involved weighing this evidence. However, I acknowledge that decisions about the delay involved compromise, coping with my multiple roles, conflicting goals, and risk to my thesis.

6.1.2 Phase 1. Project construction and planning: what is going on for adoptive parents in their communications with school staff?

Following approval, I requested volunteer members for the Focus Groups. This was achieved via letters written by me, but sent out by the Adoption Team to ensure adoptive parents' anonymity of contact details. The broad aim of the research project was explained in the information and consent letter to participants. It was explained that all focus groups would take place on the same evenings that the ASG met [i.e. the first Tuesday of the month, at the same time] and that the usual meeting area would remain available with a member of the Adoption Support Team for parents who did not wish to participate. The supporter and I met to discuss the planning and preparation of the initial focus group. I went to the meeting with a draft framework and ideas for discussion. A focus group [FG1] of adoptive parents explored the key issues for them with school staff and considered desirable and non-desirable characteristics of information sharing systems. The Focus Group structure was developed making reference to literature and thinking presented in the Methodology Chapter. Questions were general to open discussion, with prompts or summarising strategies during the course of the sessions as required [Appendix 5]. Semi-structured interviews of two adoptive parents explored their adoptive situation within the communicative interface with school staff in order to provide richer contextual information. In general, questions opened the discussions, moving to specific questions and finishing with broad closing questions [refer to Appendix 14 for types of questions and their purposes].

I provided feedback to the participants in the subsequent meeting of the Focus Group [FG2]. They had the opportunity to edit any content they felt did not represent their views. The Focus Group explored the views of adoptive parents of factors that support the communications with school staff and the problems and constraints of such. This was framed by the use of a Force Field Analysis and helped to inform the planning of subsequent action. This was used to illuminate my understanding of the views of the participants and to take into account the potential facilitating factors and barriers that may have been raised by the deductive conceptual framework and *a priori* themes. [refer to Appendix 11 and 12 - force field analysis of the strengthening and inhibiting forces in communications between adoptive parents and school staff]. The participants explored the factors that helped and hindered them in their communications. They then discussed which they felt were most important. The factors were grouped with other areas if there were similarities. A draft was produced by the group from the session. A Working Party edited the draft to share with the next meeting of the Focus Group. [WP1, comprising of the supporting SW and me. A volunteer parent from the Focus Group was invited but unable to attend].

6.1.3 Phase 2. Design and collaborative action based on shared inquiry:

how will the participants generate guidance in order for it to be used as a tool to allow information exchange?

I considered priorities in view of maintaining continued access and entry to the research to inform further planning. I monitored the impact of legislative changes in areas of adoption and SEN to maintain coherence and integrity within the research. This contributes evidence of how I have challenged and tested my own assumptions and interpretations continuously throughout the project.

The next Focus Group [FG3] reviewed the previous work on the Force Field analysis with the opportunity to edit any content they did not consider represented their views. The more powerful forces [e.g. open conversations, school systems for sharing with parents and awareness of staff of children's issues] were considered key factors in developing the content of an information sharing system. The Focus Group engaged in reflection on currently used processes of information exchange. They considered aspects of what was helpful and useful for them and school staff in moving forward with this work. This FG3 session considered several examples of other information sharing guides reported on in the Literature Review. [Appendix 6 Focus Group Phase 2 questions, prompts and assurances of confidentiality]. Appendix 13 shows examples of photographs showing the highlights and comments made by participants. The Focus Group developed key issues of preferred documentation into a preliminary format. The Working Party [WP2] integrated the ideas into a draft to present at the next focus group.

I considered priorities in view of developments and continued access to the research to inform further planning. The data was transcribed by me throughout to ensure confidentiality. I acknowledge my position as an 'insider' helped to 'sensitise' me to recognise, or to bias towards, certain codes (Hennink et al., 2011, p. 219).

6.1.4 Phase 3. Evaluation: how will the guidance be evaluated?

The draft guidance was evaluated and amended with a focus group [FG4] of participants who gave their views on the content. The Group considered the benefits and negatives of using the Resource. [refer to Part Three for the participants' responses to resource development]. The Group thought a script would be useful for them to introduce the use of the Resource to the child's teacher, assistant or SENCo and to structure the conversations. While the action research cycles operate in a systematic manner, Heron (1996, in Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p. 11), cautions against rigidity, instead allowing for creativity. Yet, action research is complex and can appear messy. A framework proved useful in order to structure problem-solving elements with participants, while acknowledging that action research is not a linear process. The framework was adapted from McNiff et al. (2003, p. 59) and used to structure the action research elements and discussions within the focus group at this stage. Participants discussed areas of need arising from the development of the draft Resource. [Refer to Appendix 15 for data using the Action research Framework to consider the application of the guidance, aided by the simplified version of the action research cycles 'construct, plan, take action, evaluate']. This also includes the emerging rationale and the decision made by participants to use a script. Again, the reader is referred to Part Three for expansion of these issues.

Working on complex problems means embracing uncertainty. I was not working on a 'task' or 'puzzle', but a multi-faceted, complex problem that demands higher level interpersonal skills and teamwork (Casey and Critchley, 1984, p.168-9) with strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation. The notion of moving along a continuum from a focus puzzle to a complex problem is also present in the literature around 'wicked' issues [in contrast to 'tame'] to refer to complex issues that cannot be resolved by one agency alone (e.g. Bore and Wright, 2009, p. 247). In order to think about the 'plate spinning' involved in conducting insider action research, I drew upon the work of Wallace (1991, p. 201), originally applied to managing multiple innovations. A transformed version, of Wallace's original model, with additional elements pertinent to action research is shown in Appendix 16: 'A model for managing complex action research settings'. I have used this model in my work in education management, as a school leader and as an EP when implementing systems, with and through other people, that demand attention to changing contexts. I wished to illuminate the competing factors at play through diagrammatical form in order to exemplify how I enacted the action research cycles while remaining attentive to internal and external factors. Legislative changes, within adoption or SEND, proved key areas to monitor. This thesis was conducted while considerable changes were taking place within adoption [e.g. to school admissions]. There were also times of uncertainty with regard to the longevity of some changes in systems [e.g. Adoption Support funding or for Virtual Headteachers to subsume an additional responsibility for children adopted from care]. It was crucial that I remained aware of legislative changes to inform the use and content of the Resource.

The model exemplifies the need to maintain awareness through reflection, consider action in the light of changing organisational and legislative climates and remain flexible to others' concerns. Making 'room to manoeuvre' involved responding to emergent influences on the data and the

processes. My adapted model illustrates the core need to make 'room to manoeuvre' to remain consistent within the context of ontological and epistemological positions while engaging in action research cycles. As new information or changes come to the fore, the model illustrates how I was compelled to monitor changes, internal and external, issues of access and entry, personal capacity and that of the participants. There was a need to monitor participation processes. Plans were adapted to improve the fit between the 'visionary ideal', the collaboration, and the constraints and challenges in the environment, with 'evolutionary planning' (Fullan, 1991, 107-109). I monitored the impact of legislative changes in areas of adoption and SEN to maintain coherence and integrity within the research. When evaluating action, it was necessary to consider if the new 'structures' were consistent with the culture of the ASG. Informing subsequent cycles and next steps, working with feedback while remaining attentive to the views of the participants, demanded attention to building collaborative relationships to ensure the quality of participation. Justification for priority review and monitoring comes from the need to manage the political system 'at every step' which can be viewed as more important than any 'rigid adherence' to an idealised picture of how these steps might work (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p. 66).

6.1.5 Phase 4. Implementation factors: what factors will promote change implementation?

It is anticipated that the 'holders' of the documentation remain the adoptive parents and they would make decisions regarding its use with their adopted children. The Working Party [WP3] used the feedback and evaluations to further refine documentation following the draft stages and to inform implementation factors. For a timeline of research tasks and activities related to the research cycles [i.e. the initial entry meetings, focus groups and working party meetings] and the participants involved in each, refer to Appendix 17 and 18 respectively.

There are plans for ways in which to maintain, monitor and evaluate the impetus of this project, the Resource and its use. It is presently thought that feedback from its use could take the form of a brief evaluation after a staff / parent information exchange. An evaluation form could be completed after the meeting by the parent and by staff, with measures to ensure anonymity and collated by the Services [EPS and Adoption]. There follows the table showing initial ideas for evaluation questions which are in the process of being developed by the adoptive parents:

Table 6.1: initial formulation of evaluation questions

| |
|---|
| <p><i>Today, the purpose is to help us develop a shared understanding of some of the issues and to use this Resource to guide find some ways of making it easier for the child and for you too.</i></p> <p><i>What have you found useful about this approach?</i></p> <p><i>What do you think are the benefits of using this Resource?</i></p> <p><i>What else might help us develop the Resource?</i></p> <p><i>What changes might you want to make?</i></p> <p><i>Any other comments?</i></p> |
|---|

It has been developed in the 'here and now' for this present group of adoptive parents, with the wider network in mind. However, implementation influences of ownership and motivation are relevant and are points for later discussion.

I will be reporting to management in Social Care when the Resource is finalised. There has been a lack of involvement from management. This could also be observed as lack of interest or engagement, yet clear interest was evident in the approval stage. Alternatively, it could be construed as positive, a reflection of trust, non-interference or waiting for the reporting of concrete information. In hindsight, knowledge of this would have been aided by regular, but brief, email drops from me to the Manager. I may have shied away from this from fear of bothering, being too pushy when it may have afforded further depth to the data set.

The resource is presently with the LA Adoption Team, as the ASG is managed by this Team and I do not have the jurisdiction to move the Resource beyond gentle reminders. The ASG have requested the Communications Team to make the resource into a format that is professional [into a more 'glossy' document, to make some changes to the layout and add the LA designs]. However, the timing of this is dependent upon priorities within the LA. This Team is presently working on LA-wide and inter-LA strategic plans following cost-cutting. When the resource is in its final copy stage, the ASG plan to disseminate the draft guidance to a wider audience of adoptive parents via adoption support groups in the local region in conjunction with requests for feedback on its usefulness and 'fit for purpose' using a questionnaire. [A notification letter will precede this in order to gain a greater return rate]. It is anticipated that some training will be offered in Attachment, run by me, as an EP with the SW. An aim would be to influence wider social context of ASG, including those who attend only occasionally. The action research processes focused on adoptive parents' communication with school staff. There is a need to gather data on the perspectives of school staff, from interviews with SENCOs, teachers and assistants. I have enlisted some SENCOs via my work to test out using the Resource. It is important to remain mindful of the need for continuous monitoring of the Resource and to remain be flexible to accommodate any new information and priorities. For example, these may be issues for the parents involved or may relate to implications of legislative and policy developments. Ongoing evaluation is an opportunity in itself and could open up further capacities for communications, parental engagement and empowerment. It may be that activating a shared process of evaluation mechanisms by stimulating reflection and furthering the co-construction of reality, of what is going on.

6.1.6 Summary

This section presented the phases of the action research: the pre-steps, planning and construction, design, evaluation and implementation; and, addressed the research questions linked to each phase. The purpose of this section was to address the theme of research *in action* to relate the narrative of what went on and to punctuate this with reflections. The research demonstrates the approaches used to problem solve, to apply and extend knowledge, and to utilise capabilities to address the practical problems requiring action solutions.

6.2 PART TWO What helps to enable and enhance communication

...the challenge for action researchers is both to engage in making the action happen and to stand back from the action and reflect on it as it happens in order to contribute theory to the body of knowledge.

Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p. 39).

This section explores the themes emerging from the research with adoptive parents on their interactions with school staff. The factors within the data help to build a picture on the conditions and processes that enhance communication practice. It is acknowledged that my position as an 'insider' helped to 'sensitise' me to recognise certain codes (Hennink et al. (2011, p. 219). To contextualise the concept of communication from the experience of adoptive parents, the data is enriched with quotations. Fisher and Torbert (1995, in Coghlan and Coghlan, 2002, p. 237) promote 'advocacy' alongside the inquiry, i.e. making explicit inferences, attributions, opinions and viewpoints, and illustrating them with directly observable data.

6.2.1 Inclusion issues for children

Issues of inclusion, and specifically, curriculum-linked issues were features of the parents' narratives. [Curriculum also emerged as a stand-alone constraining factor from the Force field analysis]. The following extract from a conversation between parents illuminates the commonalities experienced by adopters regarding inclusivity of curriculum demands:

FG 006 ... had to do a set of photos of their lives so far. "Bring in your favourite photos, one from every year of your life"... "Oh. Would you like us to start at age 3 then?" And the photos, there aren't any until he's two. And then, well, they're just, doesn't seem right.

FG 007 ...We've had the one where you say the kinds of homes you lived in and that.

FG 002 ... family tree, houses, ...

FG 001 ...Reception class "take a picture in about when you"

FG 003 Other stuff. how much you've grown. Well, you know how little she is and that she's on growth stuff. [due to Foetal Alcohol Syndrome - FAS]. To go on about it, makes it all worse. It's because of the FAS and it's .. makes her think, well, it's not like being normally small, is it?

FG 004 They had a thing last year when they were doing about evacuation. And they said to the kids "You're going to leave your mums and dads and you're going to get new mums and dads. You won't see your mums or dads for a long while. We need to keep you safe." It freaked her out.

The following quotations illustrate how parents thought staff should consult with them and consider the children, their needs and their contexts when planning work.

FG 003 ...They need to really think about what might be going on for these kids when they plan a topic.

FG 001 ...If they would just say. "These are the things we're doing this term."

FG 004 ...[should ask] "how do you think it feels for her?" And, you know, for us.

A parent remarked that adopted children share similar contexts to other children who do not live with their birth parents

FG 007 It's not just XXX that it affects. They'll be plenty of other kids in the school, and the class, , that don't, like, live with their birth family, because they're in care, or don't have a dad or their dad isn't theirs, he's their younger brother's and their dad doesn't have anything to do with them. Or whatever. There must be loads of kids affected like that.

One parent related that school staff give advanced information about forthcoming curriculum issues. She observed that it would be useful to prepare her child in advance of areas to be covered in topics:

FG 005 ...Our school does give out information about the topics for the term, so I suppose we could look more closely at that. But it's not that detailed and doesn't cover enough really. You'd have to really think if anything is likely to come up. We need to be told really. I think so, it would help if we knew then, if it's something they've got to cover, then we could at least prepare them.

Adopters discussed problems presented by their children, and these centred on emotional and attachment issues. As explored in the Literature Review, issues within the domain of behaviour may be associated with parental confidence, self-efficacy and power imbalances. It is noteworthy that parental engagement and confidence increased particularly for pupils with social, emotional and behaviour difficulties using the 'structured conversations' model (Humphrey and Squires, 2011, p. 54). It is suggested that when developing mutual understanding and exploring problem situations in collaboration with staff, parents feel able to share the difficult areas of behaviour, feeling more confident and included in the arena of information exchange, without the risk of staff apportioning blame. Parents may be experiencing high levels of anxiety about their capacity to parent under difficult situations and could be reluctant to share unless feeling supported. As Roffey (2004, p. 103) asserts, where staff give the impression that responsibility for the child's behaviour is a shared endeavour and approach parents for their expertise, the outcomes have positive 'ripple' effects. This bodes well for future difficult conversations to take place. The parents expressed how they related the children's behaviour problems as issues relating to emotional and relational needs. Difficulties with behaviours were prominent and were framed as problems with trust, self-esteem and anxiety.

FG 001 Like how they struggle with getting on with people. I mean, for him, it was all about trust.

FG 002 Trusting the teachers, all the staff. If you think about it, there are so many they meet in the school day that they've got to trust.

FG 005 She has this thing where, the first term is really bad. Getting used to her new teacher. Can't settle down. We talked to them about it. It's trust.

FG 007 Impulsive, get distracted.

FG 008 Even if they're with the same teacher, they have assistants and other teachers, they have assembly, they have dinner ladies. All that really.

FG 002 They did a Boxall on him. It was all low. His self-esteem.

FG 003 We've had mainly behaviour stuff... like when she first started school.

FG 006 He was still very anxious about leaving me, like I'd not be there at all. He was ok in the house, but he'd still follow me a lot, then forget where I was and panic.

The parents sought to explain the reasons for their children's difficult behaviours:

FG 005 I mean, now, we put it down to her needing to trust the adult, feel secure in what was happening. She was probably worried when she had to leave the room. Transition times. That sort of thing. Attachment problems.

6.2.2 Awareness and information sharing

Related to inclusion themes above, we are moving our thinking with the concept that inclusive practice demands awareness. All parents wished to share their children's adoptive status with the school staff. The adoptive parents related experiences of re-telling their child's story over many occasions in different contexts. For example, some stated that they felt they needed to explain again the child's context to another teacher when they felt they had previously related the information to school. They related that when they gave verbal information to school, sometimes this was not consistently passed to other staff.

FG 007 I've had to tell them again, like when I tell them at parents' evening and it's not passed on. It's like, because before, they've had really bad times at first and I think it's something to do with the heroin or cocaine. And all their teeth rotted and every time you'd like see the dentist, you'd see another dentist and you'd go through everything again.

FG 008 And then you'd go to something else, another professional, and it's go through it again. You can't be doing that all the time. And you find yourself explaining it again. That is a real, you know, so difficult. ...like, if they have a medical appointment, and they say "is there any family history?" "I don't know", and why? And they say, "You don't know?" and you find yourself explaining all again. And constantly, "why why". It's exhausting and I feel, it's like it's something I've done, well obviously not what I've done, but it makes you feel responsible, like it's my fault, and they're there when you have to do this and it's awful for them. It makes them feel ashamed of it all, really.

FG 007 We keep needing to say it all the time, again.

This is reminiscent of the criticism shared by parents of children with SEN, re-telling information to professional after professional, evoking the problems of services working together reported in Lamb (2009). One parent explained that when information had been given, it was unused:

FG 008 "Oh I don't read everything so closely." He said to us "I like to make up my own mind". "But if his information has been passed onto you then it's important. It's important for him, for him settling into his new class." It wasn't being picked up.

Further issues relating to the uses and purposes of information centred around the confidentiality issues. Parents explained that there were issues informing professionals about sensitive information. This conversation illustrates parents' views on the dilemmas that arise when their children disclose information for themselves.

FG 005 ... she disappeared off with a couple of her special friends. And they were up in her bed and they'd emptied all her special box of stuff, like when she was a baby, her first card, a balloon the foster carers had saved. You know, bits and bats. The hospital band. Things. Memorabilia. It's all over the bed, and I'm thinking, you can't claw that control back. Her friend's mum knew, but the other friend didn't. And then, I got the children in the neighbourhood asking, "X said she was adopted. Was she? Why?" all that stuff. and she was asked questions. She said to me, "So and so at school said I was making it up. I'm not, am I? But they said this ... and that" You just can't get it back once it's all out there. But I worry. They can't untell it. Can there be a safety in knowing? It's out there and done? Or is it unsafe for them?

FG 007 ...the eldest, the dad had gone to prison. I told the teacher in case he mentioned it. He had. Told all his friends. Can't put that back in now.

FG 008 .. we've had lots of X's friends asking lots of questions. They've been very matter of fact. I've had to speak to one or two of the mums, actually. They were ok with it, in fact, they were a bit embarrassed really. It was like they, I don't know, but knew a bit that they were asking so much stuff. they hadn't thought about it needing to be private. So it was important I did talk with them. But it had been bothering her. Normally she's quite feisty, so if she's upset, it is bothering her. One of her friends had then made up that she was adopted, that she'd got siblings that didn't live with her, that were adopted and it was ... and was really going on. Someone else had called her a liar. And then told the teacher, so she had to deal with it. She did ask me what I wanted her to do with it, which was good. I did have to speak with that child's mum ... she was mortified. "I don't want to upset you but please don't take this the wrong way, but ..." and she was absolutely mortified. I said, "No, don't tell her off. She's not in trouble, but curious, and telling her off would make it worse." She's fine now, she's had a conversation with her. And the mum was really upset and then she came to me. and I said "it's fine, the only reason I had a word with you was it was because it was becoming once a week, this conversation between them.

A parent remarked on the children being the holders, being responsible and protecting the information for themselves as they matured.

FG 005 We've had the conversation with both of them sort of thing. You know, at primary school a lot of people might know. You're going to a brand new school. A lot of people don't know you . they're not going to find out. It's not like it's secret, but it's private. "If you want to tell a close friend, that's fine, but they might tell somebody else. Do you want everybody to know? Sort of letting them make the decisions, really.

Among the parents there were differences between the amount of information shared and the timing. All shared the adoptive status, mostly at the onset of schooling, but some remarked that they had to tell the teacher when there was a change of staff, as the information had not been passed on. One stated that she had specifically asked that all the staff knew that her child was adopted, what that meant for his early life, as the staff moved around the school for some specific lessons. Adopters expressed the views that they wished to develop greater awareness in school staff of adopted children's experiences. They talked about awareness of the 'impact' and of 'getting it'; of having a real understanding of what it meant and the implications.

FG 008 And that was when she apologised; she realised what it meant. The impact. I don't think she really thought it would matter.

FG 007 The teacher didn't even think. She was a bit mortified after.

FG 008 They should have thought.

FG 006 They need to understand it. What it's like.

FG 008 They weren't unkind, just didn't realise the extent of it all. So we muddled through a bit.

The following extended quote from a semi-structured interview with one of the adoptive parents helps to illuminate what 'getting it' might really mean for staff in school. During the course of the extract, we also learn how the issue was resolved within the school.

SSI 020: I remember saying to the teacher: " he needs to know what's happening, when I'll be back" Because, it was like "mummy will come for you at lunchtime" or it could be "mummy will come after school" or "after lunch" or ... whatever. They staggered the whole induction process to school. And I said to her "he needs to know I'm coming back" "Oh, they're all like that, he'll be totally fine, don't worry, he won't break" Well, he didn't know that I'd come back,And I didn't want that happening at school. But she didn't get it. Didn't realise that he really, truly would worry that I wouldn't be back... I remember I didn't know what to do, who to talk with about it at school. I talked with the adoption team and they said to try to talk to the SENCo at school... I made an appointment. She was brilliant. Said, "oh we didn't realise he would feel it like that" and she wanted to know what we would do, what we did at home to settle him. And what we wanted to happen at school.

It was asserted by Humphrey and Squires (2011, p. 14, 106) that additional information and knowledge about pupils that emerged from the structured conversations with parents, enabled teachers to change their prior expectations and empowered parents to become more proactive in

discussing their child's needs. Awareness of issues will bring about responsibilities and opportunities for school staff to act on the information, and given the confidential nature of much of the information, may strengthen a trusting relationship between staff and parents. In sharing information with school staff, parents are also accepting shared responsibility for how they wish the information to be used and the consequences of the information being 'out there'. The potential for control over these interactions will be influenced by how schools and parents work in partnership. It is suggested that developing awareness of the issues of concern could bring about positive, long-term changes in the dynamics of working in partnership.

6.2.3 Working in partnership and inclusive practice with parents

The previous quote illustrates how the parent had moved from a position of feeling unable to talk about the problem, to one where her views were elicited and the problem was shared. The parents articulated the thinking that enabling school staff to learn from them about the child's context would encompass translating in the school context. The shared meanings ['getting to know' the child] gave impetus to their future actions ['what would be helpful']. They perceived the benefits for the staff, the child and themselves.

FG 001 And it helped for them to get used to him as well. Get to know him. What he found hard and things.

FG 002 And what we did want to happen was really the process of understanding where they've come from and what it means for them.

FG 007 And they said, they asked us what we thought. . . . About what we knew would be helpful.

It was evident from the parents' explanations when faced with difficulties that they are familiar with trying to figure out what is going on for their children in school, in their use of framing behaviours within attachment domains and the significance and potential impact of knowledge. Parents related that they felt the need to be trusted in their knowledge and judgements about what was helpful for their children.

FG 006 Let us come in and tell them. I mean, they need to pass on the stuff we've said before.

FG 005 And I don't feel there's trust, the same. It's trust.

Some commented on the fact that they were new parents of school age children and this hindered their confidence in dealing with school staff:

FG 005 But we'd not had her long and we weren't used to dealing with school.

The involvement of parents is a key factor within supportive school cultures. A few parents explored the helpful behaviour of staff that kept them informed, and enabled them to get in touch with school and discuss issues.

FG 008 I get in touch with ... We have a Community Support Manager. She's around. I can email her. She's good about that. I usually get to see her within the week, in a few days.

One parent related how school staff had regularly liaised regarding school issues and, for example, had supported the child in class transitions:

FG 007 Generally, we've been pretty lucky really. They've had a meeting for us about moving classes So, ... they said " we're going to let him go to visit the class a few times. ___ is going with them. There were a few of them who needed the transition package, .. just generally get used to being there. ...And they let me know how it was going and stuff. ...I think it really helped him.

A contextually richer picture was gained from a semi-structured interview of a participant who describes how she felt unprepared to discuss issues 'off the hoof' and feeling dissatisfied about being requested to 'have a word' with staff in front of other parents. The language used by school staff ['controlling', 'defiant'] was mentioned as an issue for the parent. 'Working it out' together with the staff was a desired future position that the parent appeared to actively try to shape through using attachment language to re-frame the behaviour labels.

SSI 021: But we could've handled it better, too. Been less defensive for a start and, you know, work it out together – school and home. But you go in and it's upsetting, so you don't think straight and you don't have time to think. It's when you collect them and it's thrust upon you to react at the time. And then, it was still happening in Year 1. We'd collect after school [we'd always try to arrange that – I worked part-time so I could – it was too long to have her in school until 5 or so]. Anyway, we'd collect her and it would be "Can I have a word?" In front of other parents, too, they'd say that. It was obvious it was to do with behaviour. Then they'd start. Like they wanted to off-load to us. She's been 'controlling', 'not doing as she's told', 'not conforming', 'defiant'. And it'd be so upsetting. You want to collect your child like all the other parents and you're faced with all this. Feeling really awful. Ashamed of her. Sad for her, because you know she's had a really stressful day. And she doesn't mean it. It's not purposeful. It's not like ... And you have to work out what to say off the hoof. What do you say? "I'm sorry. I will talk to her". I think that's what they want to hear? But there's no talking it over, working it out. That'd be more useful. And we have got better with that. We do try to say, if something goes wrong, we do try to talk about attachment issues. Say something like "mmm She does find it difficult to focus on ... blah ... and that can be because she's struggling to understand but she won't tell you she doesn't know it, so she does that instead.

6.2.4 Interpretations and perceptions of the language and behaviours of staff

Working together with school staff was hindered by systems that made it difficult to make contact. Moreover, parents related teacher behaviours that they felt did not respect them. This was not

simply connected to respecting the knowledge that parents brought about their children, but was associated with 'dismissive' teacher behaviours and language.

FG 001 ...I felt I was being dismissed. ...

FG 002 ...Not just 'telling tales' to us.

FG 006 ...Kind of when he has to do something ...different, someone different and it all goes wrong. He gets all angry. But he can't tell them what's wrong, so they think he's just being angry and naughty and stuff. We have to explain it.

FG 003 ...Seeing her as naughty.

As is evidenced by the parents' remarks above, working in partnership to develop knowledge about the children was affected by the behaviour and language of staff. The use of language and meanings was identified as a barrier within the aforementioned Force field analysis. During the course of focus group and semi-structured interviews, parents related information with emotional content. This conversation highlights the commonalities of the parents' views:

FG 006 ... I felt offended, to tell the truth. Really offended. I didn't know what else to say. What do they expect? It's just asking for problems, to be truthful.

FG 004 like things they're not allowed to say... because it'd make you want to punch them.

FG 007 like the Receptionist, she said, oh.....she said "Wasn't they lucky." I went about the Reception places and she said they were lucky because they had priority. Like as if they'd won a prize. Well they weren't lucky to have had happened what happened, were they? She's blown it.

FG 003 [curriculum issue] ... there is harm. It just makes it Seems like so horrible. Stands out that he's had a rough time then. It emphasises it.

FG 001 like about, when they say "their real mum and dad", "oh aren't you good taking them on"

FG 002 and when they say "but they're all alright now they're with you, everything's fine....."

*FG 003 When had to do [curriculum issue]. I mean! What the ****.*

As discussed in the Literature Review, the domain of pupil behaviour can be fraught with feelings of mistrust and blame. The following quote illustrates how this parent is dissatisfied over the framing of the behaviour and the labels for the behaviour, with an expressed preference for improved understanding.

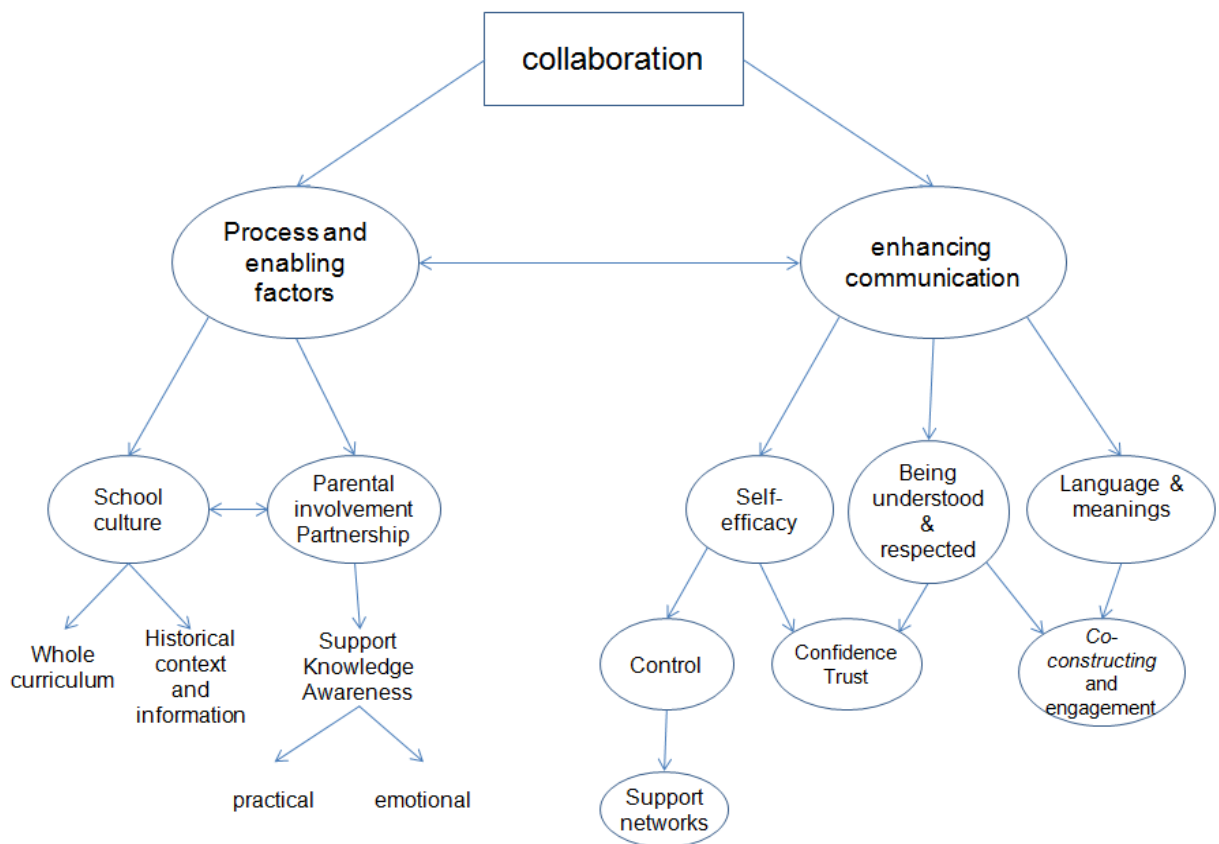
FG 005 ..The Reception teacher said she was being 'defiant' and wanted to always 'do her own thing', 'not do as she was told'. Things like, wouldn't line up. Wanted to stand and hold the door instead. Always trying to 'manipulate', she said...The teacher could have handled it better, by not being so damning about her behaviour and trying to understand why.

Successes and failures in their interactions with school staff may relate to how the parents view themselves and others and how they view the school systems. Given specific issues related to background history, sharing information may be a particular emotionally charged challenge. Factors such as adoptive parents' views of themselves as protectors of their children, may heighten emotional responses from them. Expressed feelings may indicate defensiveness. The language used above seems to indicate how some adopters may view others and that this may influence their future interactions [e.g. '*she's blown it*']. This emotive language may reflect feelings of disempowerment. Dissatisfaction with the behaviour and language of staff may contribute to a severance of or a breakdown in communication between adopters and staff. The perceived causes of success or failure in relation to historical experiences raises possible associations and interpretations within frameworks of self-efficacy and attribution theory. For example, adopters may be more likely to attribute positive interactions with school staff to factors both within their control [informing staff, working together] and their own competencies. However, adopters could interpret difficult experiences with their personal failures to engage with others about their child or attribute these to factors outside their control [the responses of staff], thus influencing and shaping the future interactions. Developing a structure that is mindful of these issues and includes factors identified by adopters could have an impact on their feelings of control, self-efficacy and confidence and, ultimately, in promoting positive communications. Building a Resource owned by the participants may contribute as a strengthening factor for increasing self-efficacy. Parallels are evident here between this context for communication and the context for inclusion as generated by Howes et al. (2009, p. 137). They argued that personalisation is an enabling factor, which demanded the creation of conditions and processes that embrace the contributions of each person.

6.2.5 Thematic conceptualisations and explanations

This section has brought together the key factors from data analysis. These themes are representative of the 'snap shot' of this research. They are also my perspectives about what has gone on, influenced by my pre-understanding and my insider position. The conceptual framework helped me to clarify my ideas and those from the literature, to provide focus and structure. It can be said to be a deductive conceptual framework based on context, existing literature and theory and represents my *etic* [or external] perspective as a researcher, albeit an 'insider' researcher. Furthermore, its journey can be mapped from the emergent stage through to the framework at the close of the thesis itself for me, the participants and the reader. The inductive conceptual framework is derived from the qualitative data and represents an *emic* [or internal] conceptual framework that includes the perspectives of the study participants. In summary, the deductive conceptual framed the research, while the inductive framework helped to answer the research questions (Hennink et al., 2011, p. 45). The framework as I close the thesis is not definitive. It is a representation of the concepts and their relationships identified by me, with the tools I consciously selected, at that point in time with those participants, at that stage in their journey. The thematic model below [Figure 6.1] explains collaboration within process and enabling factors and communication factors. Subthemes are factored within these.

Figure 6.1 Thematic model of the factors that enhance and support adoptive parents' collaboration and communication with school staff.



I developed all thematic models due to time constraints of the workload of the supporting Social Worker and those of gaining more regular access to participants. The thematic model is derived from the full data set of the Focus Groups and semi-structured interviews of the research to illustrate the factors that both enhance and support parents in their communications with school staff. I read and re-read the transcripts I had produced, using highlighters and making some notes. I used a combination of notes, colour-coding and labelling to code, revise and organise the data into themes. Following segmenting and then labelling texts with initial codes, the codes went through a process of refinement, noticing repetition and links. Weaker codes were withdrawn, for example, 'homework issues'. 'Assessments of needs' arose from mention of "They [staff] did a Boxall on him", however, no further specific assessments were mentioned in the transcripts. Codes were presented on notes and cards to group and categorise in different ways. Thematic maps and diagrams were used to visually develop ideas and links. As the thematic analysis progressed, themes emerged from the data. Some codes were merged into an overarching theme. For example, 'language used to describe difficulties', 'language used to describe behaviour', 'language used by teachers' and 'words causing stress and anxiety' were subsumed under the theme of 'language and meanings'. A theme of 'disclosure' became contained in different contexts with the themes 'confidence' and 'trust'. Codes were reviewed to reflect more accurately the content of the extracts of the transcripts. It became apparent that key themes were those of emotions expressed

by the participants in terms of the language and meanings of exchanges. These were not fundamentally expressed in those terms, but were underlying concepts that sometimes offended participants or that made parents feel respected in communications with staff. [Refer to Appendices 19, 20 and 21 for examples of raw data, coding and theme development].

As the process of generating and refining themes took place, there seemed to me to be an overwhelming focus on the [more practical] process factors that supported collaboration with school staff in contrast with the communication factors. It is acknowledged that this is not a definitive picture. The model attempts to explain the process and enabling factors played by school culture and of inclusive partnerships with parents. Using inclusive language, working things out together, co-constructing, developing feelings of self-efficacy and being respected underpin effective communications and relationships with staff. Knowledge, information, and practical and emotional support are key subthemes to which we will next focus our attention.

6.3 PART THREE: The Resource: an enabling tool for enhancing communication

It should be noted that this previous section and thematic model are intertwined with and reflect the overarching action research project of which the Resource development work was an integral part. However, they are presented separately for ease of understanding and to capture distinct elements. The action research focused on collaborative practice for Resource development. Action research aims to produce 'practical knowing', the knowing that shapes the quality of action in the moment (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p. 36). The participants co-constructed the Resource with me acting as an insider who had additional multiple roles. The Resource can be viewed as a practical representation of the emerging themes while simultaneously acting as a means of making communication happen.

Guided role play scripts [i.e. reading from the script] were used to scaffold and support participants to practise their skills and reduce feelings of anxiety by rehearsing the script in a safe, non-threatening emotive environment. [see Appendix 22 for a script for the initial meeting with school staff]. This could also be seen as creating structures and procedures and learning *in situ*, to scaffold the thinking. The work of Shani and Docherty (2003, in Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p. 72) formalises this design stage as creating a 'blueprint' for action within the 'learning by design' change process.

I use scaffolds in my consultation work with others. I think that testing out activities is less threatening to others with the safety net of guiding structures. I think it helps give voice to the participants, when they are supported in this way. Utilising practical tools can help people to move through the stages of the guidance without relying on memory. I believed that 'facilitation would make it possible to create and sustain momentum' (Howes et al., 2009, p. 124) in a project that was transient by the very nature of time between ASG sessions and that was subject to organisational politics and changes.

The rationale for the Scripts approach was underlined by the responses made by participants during the course of the research about feelings of uncertainty when approaching school staff. They felt they did not have the permission or approval needed to make the approach or they felt anxious about the possible reaction of the staff, as exemplified by the following quotes.

Cautious, not offend;

FG 007 I say, "could you just .." to the teacher;

FG 008 Awkward;

FG 003 Don't want to upset the teacher;

FG 005 Don't want to make the teacher cry;

FG 002 I let it go so I won't upset them.

FG 001 Sometimes I'm persistent, but it's hard to say if they're wrong.

When working on individual sections of the Resource, participants wished the document to reflect their respect for school staff and used words such as '*recognise what teachers could do to help*' and '*recognise that they're busy – use websites.*' The resource itself, as previously stated, is awaiting the process of being transformed from draft form to a professionally produced document by the Communications Team. The individual pages and sections of the Resource are shown in Appendix 23. The layout and contents reflect the participants' opinions. For example, they wished to use their own direct quotes to interest the reader, to engage staff to think about perspectives of real people: '*It gets the message about real children, real needs*'.

Using language inclusive to the ASG, in terms they have given, in terms they can relate to and identify with, enables authentic research. Managing the power imbalance was attempted by using parents' own meanings; using the empowering quality of language, as opposed to controlling language by being selective. Williander and Styhre (2006, p.246) highlight the need for translation between the language of researchers versus that of practitioners. An action research methodology, with an insider perspective can reduce the need for this translation.

The participants related feelings of anxiety about having a conversation, with consideration of teachers' needs and feelings, and also their own worries about feeling able to and in control to sensitive talk. Moreover, as the above quotes show, the parents felt they needed legitimate approval, or confidence that their initiation would be well-received. The Resource may give them the permission to 'nudge' an interaction. The following table presents participants' views regarding the use of the Resource as a tool for enhancing communication.

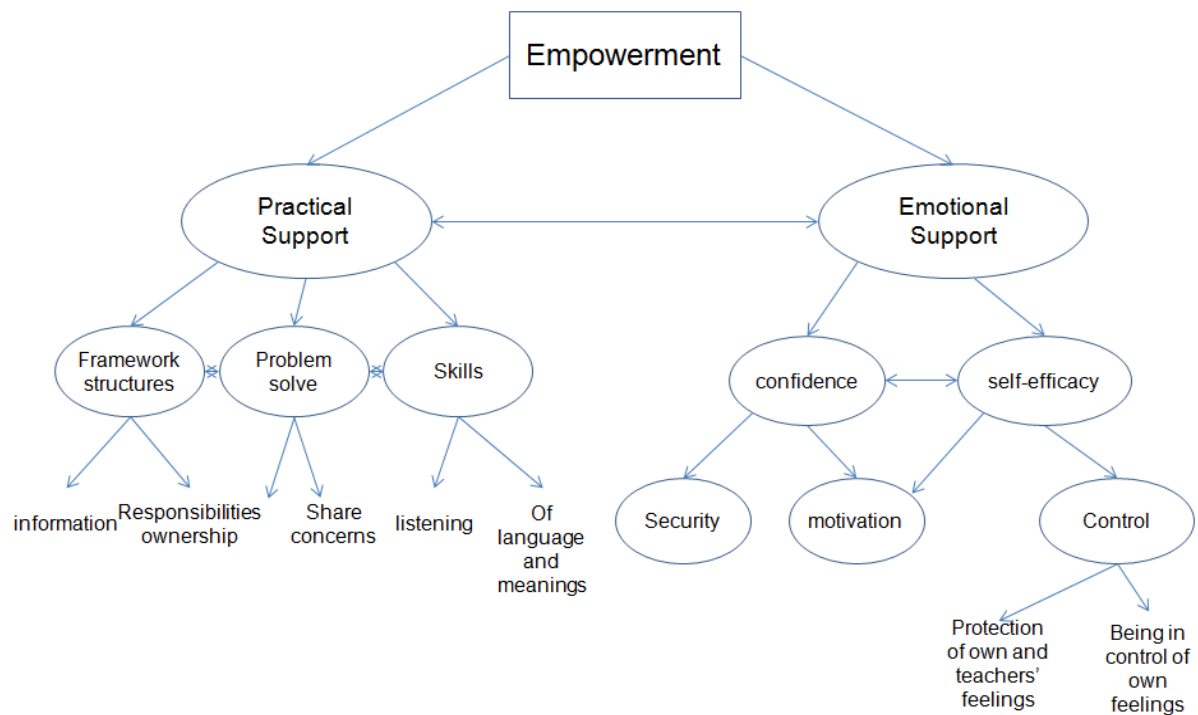
Table 6.2. The use of the Resource: participants' views.

| |
|---|
| <u>Use of the Resource tool</u> |
| What are the benefits in using this Resource tool? How would it help? What does it do for you? |
| <i>So it's happened. This is their story.</i> <i>It's real evidence. For school records.</i> <i>Knowing you're doing something to help.</i> <i>Helps you remember.</i> |

| |
|---|
| <p><i>Bit of a safety net.</i> <i>Gives security ... knowing what better to say.</i> <i>Can cope better knowing I won't get, I won't cry, get tearful.</i> <i>It's done together in this group.</i> <i>Safety in numbers. I like that we're in this together. It's an idea to try.</i> <i>I like these kinds of things. These kinds of jobs for everyone.</i> <i>So I've got the skills. Things to say properly that I'll more likely remember when I'm in the middle of talking with the teachers.</i></p> |
| <p>What negatives are there in using this approach?</p> |
| <p><i>Might feel a bit silly.</i> <i>What if they're [the teachers] not interested</i> <i>They might not want information.</i> <i>They might want to make their own minds up.</i> <i>Might want to find out for themselves.</i> <i>Might have their own forms for us to fill in.</i> <i>They're [the teachers] in charge.</i> <i>They might have a special meeting for us planned.</i> <i>Might take up too much time.</i> <i>Inconvenient for them.</i></p> |
| <p>When might its use be appropriate?</p> |
| <p><i>When they start playgroup / nursery / school</i> <i>When they move schools.</i> <i>When they move classes.</i> <i>Before they move classes.</i> <i>When there is a problem.</i> <i>If there is a problem.</i> <i>If the teacher changes.</i> <i>If they ask for it.</i> <i>At meetings.</i> <i>If we want to use it.</i> <i>At parents' evening.</i> <i>Annual reviews [EHC Plans].</i> <i>If they ask us something that's a bit complicated to answer.</i> <i>When they say "can we have a meeting?"</i> <i>When something has gone on like a disclosure from the child. [trigger]</i></p> |

The Resource generally supported two main functions: practical structure and emotional support. These strands are clearly illustrated in Figure 6.2. The thematic map attempts to encapsulate the empowering capability of the Resource from the participants' views of the emotional and practical support structures.

Figure 6.2. Thematic map showing the Resource potential for empowerment



It is congruent with the overarching thematic model shown in the previous part. In other words, key features of Figure 6.1 are present in Figure 6.2. This is a deliberate action to illustrate the centrality of the themes in 6.1. The Resource to support communication is only one element of the potential overall enhancing factors in the process of collaboration between staff and adoptive parents. The processes to develop Figure 6.2 are similar to that described for Figure 6.1, although the data set used was confined to that of Focus Groups Three and Four [FG3, FG4]. However, as I developed Figure 6.1 in the first instance, the themes were very prescient in my workings.

These practical and emotional supports shown in Figure 6.2 seem to provide both information and to communicate responsibilities of parents and of staff. Problem solving needs to encompass, for these participants, the owning of responsibilities. This is enacted alongside social and political equality of systems to facilitate the sharing of concerns [e.g. through empowering mechanisms to 'allow' communication]. The skills of communicating include managing and being attentive to the power imbalance of language and meanings. Figure 6.2 attempts to capture the emotional support that it may facilitate. A sense of control of their own emotional feelings that may lead to self-efficacy. [e.g. so they 'won't cry' when they need to convey information to staff]. Feeling safe, secure and motivated in using the Resource could contribute to increased feelings of confidence. Parental involvement does not mean professionals dictating the terms of the relationship but rather a more equal approach based on respect, trust, empathy and integrity (NQIN, 2010, p.2) with feelings of efficacy within collaborative practice (Roffey, 2004, p.95). Adoptive parents taking charge of the use of the Resource may enable feelings and strengths of motivation and ownership. They are more likely to be motivated should they use it. They are the holders of confidential information and should, therefore, remain in control of how it is shared.

6.4 PART FOUR: Evaluating and judging the research

Due to the evolving and dynamic nature of action research, the rationale for this section is to review and re-judge the thesis within the quality criteria initially set out in the Methodology. It seeks to provide summary evidence that the problems were framed in a manner that met approved criteria for judgements. I make reference to factors of trustworthiness and authenticity. I embedded the research in its methodology and applied the goals of action research and validity criteria as espoused by Herr and Anderson (2005, p. 55). These are expanded below.

Table 6.3 Goals of Action Research and Validity Criteria.

| <u>Goals of Action Research</u> | <u>Quality / Validity Criteria</u> |
|---|------------------------------------|
| The generation of new knowledge | Dialogic and process validity |
| The achievement of action-oriented outcomes | Outcome validity |
| The education of both researcher and participants | Catalytic validity |
| Results that are relevant to the local setting | Democratic validity |
| A sound and appropriate research methodology | Process validity |

Participative partnerships are not easy to achieve in action research. Cultural, political and social factors interact within and enact upon the research cycles. My multiple roles, others' views of them, issues of access, belonging, ownership, capacities, assumptions, etc., open possibilities and pose barriers for action and workable outcomes. I have sought to clearly reference these within the thesis. I have attempted to make the complexity visible, while guiding the reader along structures I found useful to frame thinking. Demonstrating quality within the research was supported with evidence through first, second and third person inquiry. Where there have been challenges and limitations in validating actions, these have been addressed with rationales for action, for example, in discussing bias of the insider position and delays due to political issues. Remaining aware of grounds for bias has been demonstrated through the research. As discussed in the Methodology Section, action research was considered a sound and appropriate research methodology, meeting 'process validity', which asks to what extent problems are framed in a way that enables ongoing learning in action and scrutinises the quality of relationships with participants. This action research approach enabled opportunities to :

1. maximise understanding of and make explicit to the reader the 'insider' and multiple role perspectives held by the researcher in the role of an adoptive parent, EP, LA officer;
2. promote a collaborative active relationship between the researcher and the members of the ASG;
3. address the issues of concern within communications with school staff;
4. empower adoptive parents to construct and apply their own knowledge
5. provide practical knowledge that will be useful in interactions with school staff.

The Methodology Chapter initially discussed quality criteria that may guide judgements for this thesis. Dialogic validity may be illustrated through the dialogue of supervision and external monitoring of the thesis. Process validity is tested by the use of a sound and appropriate research methodology. Democratic validity, referring here to the collaborative and ethically bound activity of a local problem, is tested by a commitment to change an aspect of the group's functioning by engaging in reflecting on experience and learning. They are taking responsibility for investigating how they can improve their contexts for their own and others' benefit. Action research has a potential for enabling a rich analysis through realistic evaluation methods, due to its requirement that researchers attend and learn, through first person inquiry while enacting research cycles. As the participants were engaging on an issue of central concern, there was a sense of self-study in action for this support group. This catalytic authenticity is also evidenced by first and second person learning. Educative authenticity is verified by the involvement of participants to engage in generating and articulating thinking and meaning around parent-school interactions. The research demonstrates potential through empowering others to create an ontologically authentic medium to develop and challenge others' constructs. Emancipatory status to produce practical knowledge, can lead to the increased well-being of people and their communities by empowering them to build new abilities to create knowledge (Kinsler, 2010, p. 186; Johansson and Lindhult, 2008, p. 97). The insider action research approach has been actively explicit and collaborative, drawing out issues and concerns. I have attempted to be accountable to authenticity in participative practice, which involves 'attention to and reflection on the personal questions and dilemmas which arise in the in the political dynamics' of the action research project (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p. 138). Participants applied knowledge elicited through the research to key issues in the development of the Resource. The Resource in and of itself is educative; in its development and applications. It represents the achievement of action-oriented outcomes, 'outcome validity', with the potential for empowering further action. However, the Resource is not the end point of the research. It should not be viewed as a 'single solution strategy', whether or not it moves to resolve the presenting problem (Herr and Anderson, 2005, p. 55). When working with groups of people developmentally it can be tempting to reduce the complex to something simple and coherent (Stuart, 2011, p. 24). I attempted to explore the emergence of the most visible issues [for example, sharing knowledge of the child] in addition to giving weight to some less obvious details such as parents' bids for interaction and access to initiate conversation with school staff. The research continues its implementation journey, which is likely to continue along ongoing reframing process.

Trustworthiness can be judged by the integrity of the research. It involves the demonstration that my interpretations of the data are credible, or "ring true," to those who provided the data. I have attempted to ensure that the data generation and analysis is representative of the action. With regard to transferability or external validity, the inquiry does not make a claim of generalisability to all adoptive parents' views, but rather that some parallel themes would be raised and, nevertheless, differences *per se* would generate further discussion and hypotheses. As asserted by Nind et al. (2004, p. 268) 'cultures, attitudes, policies and practices are interwoven with complex contexts'. As acknowledged in the Methodology Chapter, the participants may be non-representative of adopters in general due to feelings of confidence, self-knowledge, efficacy and skills in joining a support group and in sharing sensitive information.

Nevertheless, these parents stated that they valued opportunities to talk with other parents, both in the ASG and when attending specific training events. These included the opportunity to take part in this Action Research and having focused sessions.

FG 001 it's good, it's really important, to talk about, you know, how they're doing at school, it's something that matters.

FG 004 Sometimes, when we're talking about something in particular, it's better, otherwise we can get a bit moany.

FG 005 Talk without stress, talk here like this. People who know what they've gone through, know what it's like, without being judged.

Questions for further application or transferability need to look at the desirability and feasibility of changing practice in another context. Pawson and Tilley (1997, p. 119) consider that it is possible to generalise from cases not because they are descriptively similar, but because of commonality of ideas. When evaluating programmes, it is important to consider what works, for whom, in what context and under what conditions: it is not interventions that work, per se, but the 'mechanisms that they release by way of providing reasons and resources to change behaviour'. (Pawson and Tilley, 1998a, p. 82).

The triggers of change in most interventions are ultimately located in the reasoning and resources of those touched by the programme. Effects are thus generally produced by and require the active engagement of individuals.

Pawson and Tilley (2004, p. 5).

Table 6.4 below applies realistic evaluation factors to the features of this research, its purpose to consider what works for whom and under what conditions. Due to the bias inherent in, for example, its small sample, its participants who are maybe active in their interactions within the ASG and with school staff, its insider position, no direct assumptions can be made about the replicability of this research. However, focusing on the subjective context of this research is not a reductive description of or judgement on the limitations of the research. It can elaborate the factors involved for the researcher, the participants and the reader. It could lead to an examination of the conditions that contributed positive effects. Some salient features may be elicited from this approach, in particular, the timely nature of legislative changes and 'environmental' factors and the strength in 'pre-understanding' afforded by the insider researcher position. The causal 'mechanisms' allowing for a rich picture of the emotive language issues described above may be those centred around the salient characteristics of the key people.

Table 6.4: Applying realistic evaluation factors to this research. Adapted from Pawson and Tilley (2004, p. 33).

| Factors | Key questions | Context for this research |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| The innovation | What are the salient features of the innovation | Insider action research by EP within a support group community. |
| The resources | What resources were used in producing the outcomes (staff time, money, equipment, space, etc) | Time within the ASG meeting schedules. LA building used for ASG. Rental of private room for confidentiality purposes incurred an additional cost. EP own time. |
| The people | What are the salient characteristics of the key people in terms of expertise, experience, commitment and so on? | The participants could be a biased, non-representative sample, given their membership to a support group, the skills, knowledge and attributes. The impetus for the research came from the ASG. Focus group participants committed to developing communication resource. EP is an adoptive parent. EP has historical membership. EP is a member of the Adoption Panel and is involved in training on attachment across the age group 0-25 and the training within LA for prospective adopters. EP had insider access to the ASG. Due to the dynamic and changing nature of action research, ethical procedures require continuous attention. |
| Pre-understanding | Knowledge, insight and experience prior to research project. | EP was an adoptive parent and thus an insider researcher. EP has knowledge about the cultures and informal systems within adoption. Dual knowledge of adoption and LA contexts. |
| Political and organisational factors | How far were the outcomes dependent on (for example) organisational / departmental structure, organisational culture, etc | There was a culture of self-study in action as the impetus came from the ASG. The supporter was a 'front-line' Social Worker. EP gained legitimacy by [re-] securing access with management. influence of position of EP and member of Adoption Panel. |
| Environmental factors | How far were the outcomes dependent on particular environmental factors (e.g. political, legislative, etc)? | Timing of research occurred during period of significant change in the adoption climate and Government priorities. Introduction of Pupil Premium in national policy. Introduction of Adoption Scorecards. Structural changes within the Adoption Team and Social Care. Inspection of Social Care. |
| Measures | What baseline, process, outcome and other measures were used to evaluate success? | Evaluation measures by staff and parents. Stimulating further development. Success of the Resource contingent on its use by existing adoptive parents. Take up of the Resource by newly approved adopters. |

Table 6.4 aims to capture elements of this research and create potential opportunities for research in similar fields. The wording around realistic evaluation has been adapted to fit the purpose of this research. Furthermore, aspects of the insider position have been explicitly referenced [such as pre-understanding, role duality and organisational factors] as I consider these aspects to be integral to this research. Implementation questions will need to focus on how the developing knowledge and practice guidance can be applied and shared beyond the local context. These issues will be extended in the following closing chapter, 'Contributions to Knowledge and Practice'.

6.5 Summary

This Chapter has discussed the action research experiences and outcomes by way of narrative, reflections and conceptualisations of the findings. The insider position and multiple roles are acknowledged as influencing understanding and the conceptualisations of the findings. Reflections on Resource development demonstrate its functional support in practical and emotional strands. The key themes include co-constructing what is going on for adopted children with language that is inclusive of the adopters' perspectives and their knowledge of their children. Nurturing parental feelings of self-efficacy and being respected are founded on inclusive practice. Explanations are suggested for the process and enabling factors played by these inclusive partnerships, systems and school culture. The quality criteria are transparent so the research can be judged within its particular contributions to knowledge and practice.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Research summary

The research addressed the aims and purposes discussed in earlier chapters. The action research approach maximised the potential of the insider position to generate rich data *in situ* while promoting a collaborative response to the social situation faced by the adopters when communicating with school staff. Through the research questions linked to phases of planning, designing, evaluating and implementing, the research explored their views of what was going on in their communications with school staff and how they generated and evaluated guidance in order for it be used as a tool to allow information exchange. The research moved concurrently with action, building knowledge about the problem and contributing towards continuous learning. The collaborative approach empowered adoptive parents to apply and construct their knowledge.

7.2 Limitations of the research

The study is unable to offer a representative picture of the nature of communication with staff beyond this context of a small number of adoptive parents. Action research projects are situation specific and do not aim to create universal knowledge (Coghlan and Brannick, 201, p. 149). It requires scrutiny from peers and those with knowledge of research and practice in these areas. It

requires further verification from the participants themselves in recognising it as a story of what went on and why. The research has been developed with and for this group of adopters and the ASG and it continues with plans to further inform evaluations and implementation beyond this group. The study is unable to predict how much of a practical and emotional support the Resource will be in interactions with school staff. The Resource is very much in the hands of individuals in how they may apply their knowledge and capabilities in the future. Conceptualisations of collaboration, the process and enabling factors and those that enhance communication, are not concrete and fixed representations of participants' views. I am not claiming that all parents have these issues and, if approached in the way of this research, that the outcomes would be positive. However, the research gives a picture of what might be happening for parents of adopted children in their communications with school staff. Attention will focus now on factors and learning experiences that may hold significance for furthering practice and knowledge.

7.3 Implications for practice

The study seeks to centre on the process of developing an action research project at the 'micro-cultural level' (Howes et al., 2009, p. 56) of the experience of this group of APs and Adoption Team in collaboration with this EP at this moment in time. In addition, the thesis aims to consider the 'macro-cultural factors' (p. 56) that impinge from wider agendas. The macro level encompasses the present climate of rapid change in adoption, in terms of legislation and media, the nature of the Adoption Service, the EPS and other LA services. It is not known how legislative changes will impact over time on demands for the nature and breadth of support services.

The knowledge and insights gained by this research will inform my professional practice. Existing approaches to service delivery, be it in the EPS or other services, may require review to promote accessibility and real engagement. I am a Governor of two schools, the Chair of one. The research will contribute towards my thinking and conversations with others about inclusive practice in general with parents in schools. Working within groups using action research approaches may signal a way forward to elicit the views of other groups within a supportive and safe context. The parents in this research expressed clear barriers in gaining access to discussing issues openly with staff. Parents' support groups could play a more integral part in educational research, particularly action research. Work with support groups may contribute a culture for 'normalising' the need for support. There may be possibilities for EPs to work with adopters within support groups or within 'drop-in' consultation approaches. Given risks to adoption breakdown, these may be timely. Additional training and knowledge, across the children's workforce, about the impact of early childhood trauma and the specific needs of adopted children may have the potential to improve the identification of needs and the provision of appropriate services. Specifically, the development of the Resource has its own potential for application within a wider network, for parental engagement and for adopters to use as previously detailed, e.g. at transition times. Sharing this approach with staff may have wider benefits for information gathering and building a picture of the child over time. Enabling parents, who it can be acknowledged, know their children best to give their views, to share their thoughts on what is going on. This needs to be facilitated by welcoming and enabling them to 'enter' into a dialogue

Suggestions for developments link closely to 'raising awareness' of adoption. It may stimulate a move towards an understanding of needs and inform decision-making on provision (Cameron and Monsen, 2005, p. 289). However, there may be a conflict of beliefs that may lead to very different approaches to this problem. As observed by Wolfendale, Russell, Norwich and Lindsay in the 90s (1999, p. 7), the stock of knowledge and research findings about specific special needs require considerable time and effort to stay abreast of theory, research and applications. Some may argue that 'labels' allow access to knowledge and strategies. Teachers have such a diverse range of needs to cater for that it is hard to see how they can 'deliver on so many disparate fronts without the specialist knowledge that certain labels allow them to access' (Riddick, 2012, p. 31). Adding knowledge about the specific needs of adopted children may not be a desirable addition. Discussing the needs of adopted children may reduce them to a homogenous group and omit the scrutiny of more subtle and possibly enabling factors that require shared attention. As Miller asserts:

The crude and simplistic blaming of teacher, pupils or parents, alternating as the merry go round of political fashion grinds on, must be countered, if only because professional optimism and clear-headedness is so unlikely to rise from a pit of demoralization. Equally, over-zealous pursuit of medical model attributions, as evidenced by [...] 'syndrome approaches', may also leave professionals, parents and pupils themselves feeling that their own actions may be of little or no benefit.

Miller (1996, p. 211)

To improve the context for communication, sufficient emphasis needs to be placed on partnership and collaboration, with mutual obligations to work together on a common issue or problem. The common ground is the commitment of both groups to ultimately benefit the child at the centre. Terminology, inclusive language and shared meanings are empowering; working relationships, trust and shared decision-making, are enabling. These imply action-based relationships. Reciprocity of trust is important. If staff truly wish to include parents, they also need to demonstrate trust by securing their active and real involvement. This thesis argues the need for supportive frameworks that emphasise the importance of collaborative working. The model offered by 'structured conversations' (Humphrey and Squires, 2011, p. 112), involving a two-way exchange of information, is one that is suggested as a vehicle to strengthen home-school relationships. Understanding and appreciating the knowledge that parents bring to discussions about their children needs nurturing through inclusive practices.

7.4 Contribution of the study to the research literature

This section aims to reflect upon the research and translate findings into usable knowledge. Through researching the experiences of adoptive parents, I have developed knowledge about their perspectives on the enabling factors involved in the communications with school staff. I consider the research to contribute to increased understanding of the behaviours and language of school staff that can lead to difficulties for parents in making contact and in interactions. The findings

recognise the enabling factors and emotional processes through which issues relating to communication can be addressed. The research, with its insider perspective has moved towards identifying practical and emotional conditions within the school–parent interface that can enhance the contribution of adoptive parents. There may implications for practice within and beyond schools for parents and professionals alike. Communication is enhanced by and depends on systems that are enabling for parents and staff to share and co-construct understandings and engage in reflective conversations.

What may be most significant about this thesis is the understanding that has been gained from how parents perceived their position in the communication arena. Their perceptions of the behaviour and language of others who ‘own’ the communication space, i.e. any and all professionals, are better understood. Their experiences of disempowerment have been evidenced through their reflections on interactions with staff. Barriers and enablers to engagement have emerged. Certain initiations by staff [with a possibly ‘loaded’ statement of ‘can I have a word?'] may contribute to breaks in communication. They may fail to develop the trusting relationships very much needed when discussing sensitive issues. The thesis may stimulate empathy for the journey of a parent from the moment that they want to share information, to making a move towards initiating entry, to engaging with staff and to feeling safe to co-construct meanings. Parents can be reticent about initiating interactions for fear of being dismissed or of offending staff. Creating a welcoming culture is essential for parents to navigate a ‘way in’ to start an interaction. The Resource can represent a route, permission to communicate with school staff, in a way that is accessible to parents. It may signal a ‘way in’ to enter into communications with school staff, with approaches that respect their knowledge, use their language and meanings in an emancipatory way that removes barriers such as blame and is inclusive of them and their children. They are concerned about constructions and attributions and would appear to welcome opportunities for respectful, shared dialogue and translating or re-framing drawing on their knowledge. Adoptive parents feel they have a crucial role to play as advocates for their children and as holders of complex and sensitive information. All these factors contribute to an inclusive arena whereby parents can legitimate and feel respected in their roles to support their children, thus stimulating feelings of self-efficacy and empowerment. Schools need to create an environment in which parents and carers feel comfortable to contribute (Lamb, 2009, p. 82). There may be implications beyond this group of adoptive parents, to other parents and guardians who may feel that school poses a communication challenge. Knowledge gained by this thesis, albeit on a small scale, albeit within a specific arena, can generate discourse around professional and personal accountability.

Translating the usable findings of parents’ experiences within this thesis can have more wide-reaching consequences. A significant feature of all action research is that the purpose of research is not primarily to contribute to knowledge or emancipation, but rather to forge a more direct link between knowledge and action so that the inquiry contributes directly to communities (Reason and Torbert, 2001, in Coghlan and Brannick, 2010, p.44). Parents’ struggles to enter a collaborative, non-threatening dialogue may be universal. Knowledge of the enabling processes and conditions can lead to improved well-being and empowerment in the parent community.

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APPENDICES

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APPENDIX 1 Search methods used for Lyons (2010): Outcomes of Adopted Children: a systematic review of the literature.

The following search methods were used to identify literature for this review:

- Literature searches in the electronic databases. Descriptors were sought to be tightly defined so as to produce relevant information within a manageable number of entries. Studies were located using the following search strings: *adopt^{t*3}, adopted, adoption, adopted child**, children; in combination with the following words: *ability; academic; achievement; adjustment; attainment; cognitive; education; home/school; IQ; learning; measures; outcomes; performance; post-placement; results; school.*
- Databases across the social sciences and some medical journals were systematically searched from 1997⁴ to date via the University of Manchester Library: psycINFO / MEDLINE / HEALTH AND PSYCHSOCIAL / NERF / ERIC / OVID. The search engine GOOGLESCHOLAR was also utilised.
- There was a dearth of qualifying studies and journals of particular relevance within database searches and as a result, the qualifying criteria could have been modified. However, the purpose of the review and its applicability to the profession of educational psychology may have been lost.
- To ensure further scrutiny and source a wider range of studies, the most pertinent journals (e.g. *Adoption and Fostering, Adoption Quarterly*) were rigorously searched by scrolling through lists of contents and abstracts back to 1997 in order to source relevant articles.
- In addition, the search systems of publishers of key journals were accessed (e.g., *INTERSCIENCE, SCIENCE DIRECT, SPRINGER*)
- Key journals' own search systems were utilised (*Adoption and Fostering; Adoption Quarterly; Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry; Child and Adolescent Mental Health; Child and Adolescent Social Work; Child: Care, Health and Development*)
- The reference lists and bibliographies of collected articles were consulted for further relevant studies on outcomes of adopted children.
- The document request system was accessed from the library for the journals not included in the library subscriptions.
- The publication searches within the DCSF, Department of Health (DH), Office of Public Sector Information (OPSI) and parliamentary websites were utilised.

³ The asterisk indicates that the search contained but was not limited to that word or word fragment.

⁴ To ensure access to papers following key policy document LA Circular DoH (1998).

APPENDIX 2: Table of focus outcome studies [with abbreviations below]

| Study | Type of study | Method of data collection | Sample | Pre-adopt Status | Age at adoption[y ears] | Age at study [years] | Outcomes discussed in the study |
|-------------------------|---------------|--|------------------------------------|------------------|--|--|---|
| Castle et al. 2000 | mixed | Questionnaires re: school progress; Interviews of parents re: family, adjustment; Denver Developmental Scales IQ – GCI of McCarthy Vineland Behaviour Scales – socialisation, communication, living skills. Mothers' intellectual levels – NART [reading] Mothers' Malaise Inventory | 52 | LA care | <6 months | 4 years and 6 years. | Good social / intellectual progress; Some indication that IQ score related to adoptive family factors. |
| Cooper and Johnson 2007 | mixed | Questionnaires to parents [+ children] Distributed via Family Placement Service | 141 | LA care | <12 | 4-16 [69%] 16+ [31%] | 39% SEN; 23% with statement 28% EP involvement; 20% other agencies 29% children's concerns |
| Kaniuk et al. 2004 | mixed | AAI by parents prior to adoption EPI PSI SDQ by parents and schools Narrative story stems | 63 late adopt 48 infant adopted | LA care | 1-6 years [late adopt] <1 year [infant adopt] | 2-4months after placement +1 year +2 years [4-8 years] | 54 of 63 late placed progress in relationships with parents and at school. 'Earlier placed the better the outcomes'. |
| Lansdown et al. 2007 | mixed | IQ WORD BRIEF Parent / Teacher ratings | 86 adopted, placement At risk. | LA care | <6 | 6-18 | IQ \bar{x} =80 WORD BRIEF 'Clinically worrying range' |

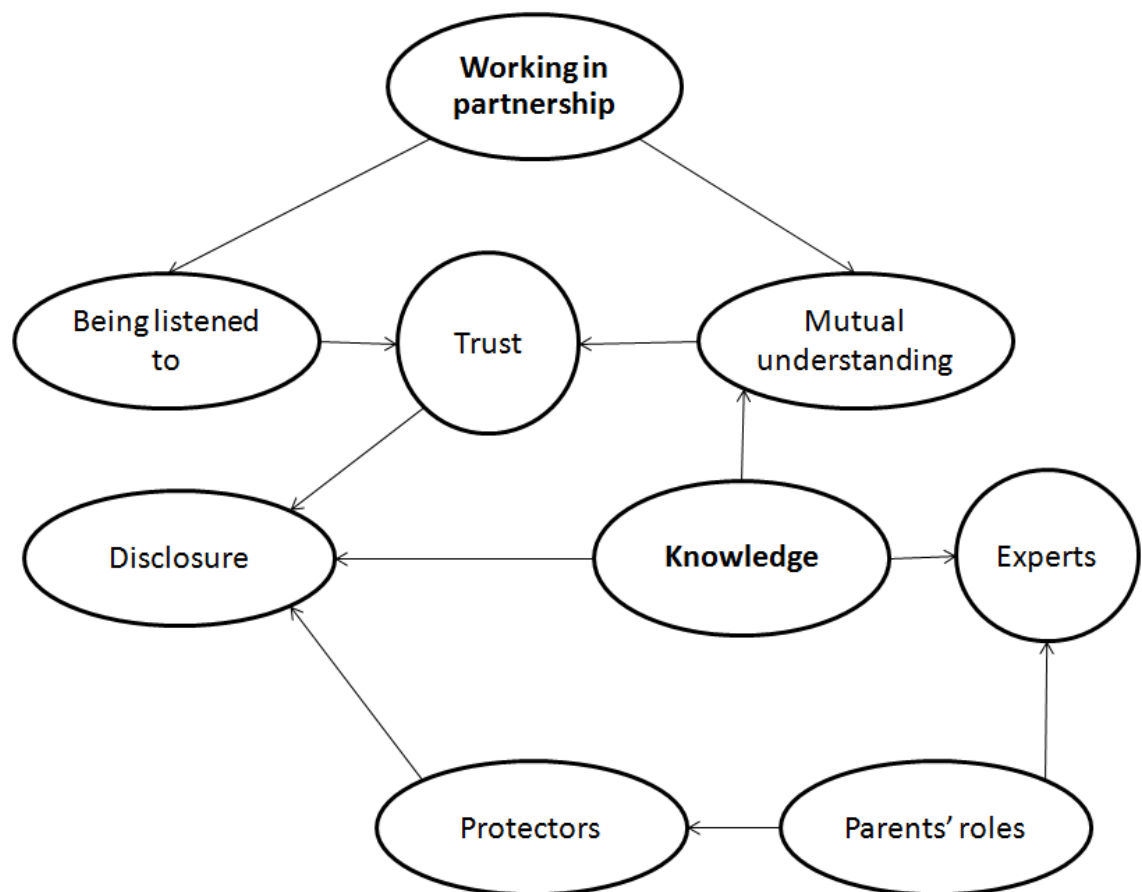
| Study | Type of study | Method of data collection | Sample | Pre-adopt Status | Age at adoption[y ears] | Age at study [years] | Outcomes discussed in the study |
|---|---------------|---|---|------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| Rees and Selwyn 2009 | mixed | Parent Interviews SDQ – parents / teachers PCCS | 130 | LA care | 3-11 – x = 5.7 | 6 years later 11 years later | 38% failed placement Of the remaining: 28% positive placements 62% continuing difficulties Hyperactivity / inattention / conduct / attachment 10% no positive 'rewards' reported by parents |
| Rushton and Dance 2004 [follow-up extension of Rushton et al., 2000] | mixed | Interviews - parents Interviews – children PCCS | 133 adopted and permanent foster care - total sample including 61 reported in Rushton et al. (2000, and 2003) | LA care | 5-11 | 11-16 | +1 yr 92% adoptions intact +6 yrs 71% adoptions intact disruption – x = at 34 months of placement peer relationship problems behaviour problems [aggression / overactivity] SDQ 40% abnormal range compared with control group of 6%. |
| Rushton et al. 2000 | Mixed | Case files /Interviews / questionnaires – parents CSW+FSW interviews SBQ Psycho/social family relationships Ratings of parental warmth / sensitivity | 61 | LA care | 5-9 | After 1 month, 6 months, 1 year | At 1 yr – 95% intact Factors to predict outcome – emotional / behavioural 72% stability |
| Rushton et al. 2003 | Mixed | As previous | As previous | LA care | As previous | After 1 month After 1 year. | Behaviour and relationship problems Post-placement support |
| Selwyn et al. 2006 | Mixed | Case files Interviews - Parents / carers | 130 at the point of 'best interest – | LA care | 3-11 – x = 5.7 | 7-21 – x = 14.7 | 42% problems with self-esteem. 39% delayed in language / reading 27% Statements of S.E.N. |

| | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|---|--|---------|--------------------|---------------------|--|
| | | SDQ PCCQ Costs to SSDs | adoption' | | | | 27% attachment problems 17% alternative educational provision or exclusion; After 7 years, 83% adoption placements intact compared to 54% intact for long-term foster care. |
| Selwyn et al. 2014 and 2015 | Mixed | Interviews Survey SDQ Measures of parenting confidence and satisfaction. Dataset. | 689 children from survey. 70 parents [experiencing difficulties] completed measures. 77 LAs. dataset of 37,335 children. | LA care | 3-11 — x = 4 | 1-30 — x = 14 | Clinically high range scores of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties 82%. 38% going well. Highs and lows (28%) Serious difficulties (21%). Disruption (9%). The majority of disruptions (57%) occurred more than five years after the adoption order. Peer relations and bullying problems in one third of the children. 57% children had run away from home. Most had been late-placed. Child to parent violence 57%. |

ABBREVIATIONS for Appendix 2 table:

| | | | |
|-------|---|-----------|---|
| AAI | Adult attachment interview | PCCQ | PCCQ – Parent Child Communication Questionnaire |
| ADHD | Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder | PCCS | Parent Child Communication Scale |
| ASQ | Adoption Satisfaction Questionnaire | PEPs | Parental Account of Child Symptoms |
| BRIEF | Behaviour Rating Inventory of Executive Functions | PAT | Phonological Awareness Test |
| CBCL | CBCL – Child Behaviour Checklist | PVT | Picture Vocabulary Test |
| CSW | Child's Social worker | PSI | Parenting Stress Index |
| EPI | Experience of Parenting Interview | SPPC | Self-Perception Profile for children |
| EFQ | Expression of Feelings Questionnaire | SSD | Social Services Departments |
| FSW | Family's Social worker | SBQ | Standardised Behaviour Questionnaire |
| GCI | General Cognitive Index | SDQ | Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire |
| NART | National Adult Reading Test | WORD | Wechsler Objective Reading Dimensions |
| | | WRMT | Woodcock Reading Mastery Test |
| | | \bar{x} | = mean value |

APPENDIX 3: Conceptual framework from Lyons (2011).



APPENDIX 4: Action Research Framework [adapted from McNiff et al. (2003)]

| |
|---|
| What is going on for us at the moment What are we doing now? |
| What do we want to do differently? Why? |
| What could we do? What could we plan to do? Why? Identify ideas for improvements. |
| Take action |
| Reflect on and review what we have done. Evaluation. |
| Monitor. Make changes Next steps .../ action |

APPENDIX 5: Focus Group 1 script and prompts.

Assurances of confidentiality.

The participants were given a further copy of the agreement they had signed previously. They were requested to re-read it and the confidentiality section was read aloud [below] to reinforce informed consent.

I am interested in hearing your views and would like to record your comments, making notes on some of your ideas, thoughts and feelings during the session. I want to assure you all data will be collected anonymously. No identifying information (e.g. names, schools or services involved) will be taken. The data will be stored in a secure, password protected location on my work laptop, to which no one else will have access. The recordings and transcription will be destroyed once the project has been submitted (approximately 2015). I regularly undertake training in Information Security and Data Protection. No-one will be able to tell who said what. I hope that this means you would feel able to speak freely. Your views are valuable and will help to influence any future educational information, training, interventions and research in the area of adoption.

If any issues are raised for you this evening, we will be around for some time. [reiterate at close of session]

[reiterate confidentiality briefly at close of session].

EP: We wanted to meet together to help think about sharing information with school staff. To help think about how we can improve things when we talk with school staff. It would be useful to talk about school issues. We could think about the things that come up when we communicate with school staff. Things that bother you. Things that go on for you in school.

Prompts:

Purposes:

check for meaning;

clarify understanding;

elicit elaboration;

elicit reflection or impact;

nudge discussions back to the topic;

Examples:

So, that kind of thing is an issue?

Can I just check that you mean?

Anything else?

Can you tell me more about that?

So, when you are talking with school staff...

How does that go on / work for you?

So, to summarise, this evening, we have talked about

Issues have been raised about

Should this evening's session have raised any issues or questions for you, then please feel that you can see us or arrange to speak with someone else. Once again, thanks to all of you for taking part. I hope you have found the discussion interesting. Your comments and ideas will be extremely useful in helping to understand the issues facing parents of adopted children. If you think about anything else after today then please feel free to phone, write or e-mail me with your comments, views, questions, etc. Thanks. Safe journey home.

APPENDIX 6: Focus Group [Phase 2]: Developing ideas for a resource.

Reiterate confidentiality and consent. Assurances of confidentiality. The participants were given a further copy of the agreement they had signed previously. They were requested to re-read it and the confidentiality section was read aloud [below] to reinforce informed consent. The participants are reminded that they are free to withdraw consent and leave at any point.

EP: I am interested in hearing your views and would like to record your comments, making notes on some of your ideas, thoughts and feelings during the session. I want to assure you all data will be collected anonymously. No identifying information (e.g. names, schools or services involved) will be taken. The data will be stored in a secure, password protected location on my work laptop, to which no one else will have access. The recordings and transcription will be destroyed once the project has been submitted (approximately 2015). I regularly undertake training in Information Security and Data Protection. No-one will be able to tell who said what. I hope that this means you would feel able to speak freely. Your views are valuable and will help to influence any future educational information, training, interventions and research in the area of adoption.

The previous focus group discussed things that were going on for you with school staff. {Lyons, 2011}. Things that bothered you. About what was going well or not so well when communicating with school staff. One of the areas that emerged from this was that people expressed a wish to have some kind of resource / some guidance or tool or something to help with school staff and that would give information to school staff about adoption. People said that they had to repeat some things when their child moved classes, so the documents would go from class to class / school to school. The ideas were to pre-empt problems. So we thought we'd work on that. And I've met with you [SW] to plan things through. We thought we could work through the process with yourselves, so that you can have control with how you want the resource[s] to look. We've got a few resources that are used with some other issues or in authorities or agencies. You can look at these to decide what you like, to give you ideas. How you'd like to use them. People can see what kinds of things you like or don't want. Or how you see it working with your child in this Authority, in the school they attend. And people could use it as they want or not at all. You would have control. It's up to you how much you share or don't share with your schools.

Prompts:

"What do you share"

"Why do you share that?"

"What would you want to include?"

"What would you not include?" Why?

"What are our preferences?"

If you want, there are plenty of example copies you can take home and read through and contact us with any further thoughts later.

So, to summarise, this evening, we have talked about [refer to flip chart]

Issues have been raised about

Should this evening's session have raised any issues or questions for you, then please feel that you can see us or arrange to speak with someone else. Once again, thanks to all of you for taking part. I hope you have found the discussion interesting. Your comments and ideas will be extremely useful in helping to understand how we can develop information sharing for parents of adopted children.

[reiterate confidentiality and consent at close of session]. The participants are reminded that they are free to withdraw consent and leave at any point.

If you think about anything else after today then please feel free to phone, write or e-mail me with your comments, views, questions, etc. Thanks. Safe journey home.

**Supporting communication between
adoptive parents and school staff**

You are being invited to take part in a research study.

Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research study which will contribute to the researcher's Doctorate qualification in Educational Psychology. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

What is the aim of the research?

The intention of this study is to use participative action research to explore your views and ideas about information sharing between adoptive parents and school staff. An anticipated outcome would be to promote more positive relationships between adoptive parents and school staff, and to raise awareness of the needs of adopted children who may experience some difficulties with school life.

Who will conduct the research?

Jo Lyons.

I work as an Educational Psychologist for Local Authority. I am also an adoptive parent. I am interested in how parents can improve the educational experiences of adopted children.

[workplace] Educational Psychology Service,

[University] School of Education, Ellen Wilkinson Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

As a participant you would be asked to take part in a one and a half hour focus group with the researcher, some members of the Adoption Team and other members of the Adoption Support Group. This would involve discussing your views on information sharing with school staff, what you may do that is helpful to share with others. It is the intention that participants will look at different kinds of information sharing resources used in the UK by some services or Adoption Support Groups to help them to discuss the kinds of resources that they think are useful. Participants may be working together to develop guidance, 'tip-sheets' and practical strategies for adoptive parents to use, e.g. when talking about their child at school, when children move classes / schools and when discussing challenging issues. You would be able to use the resources as you choose due to issues of confidentiality with children who are adopted.

Why have I been chosen?

You are being invited to take part in this study, because you are an adoptive parent and, as such, you are able to attend the Adoption Support Group which meets on the first Tuesday of the month at Number One Riverside [6.45-8.45pm]. This is a small scale research study and there will be approximately 15 others involved.

What happens to the data collected?

Discussion during the focus group would be audio recorded and then transcribed. All data will be collected anonymously and confidentiality will be maintained throughout.

How is confidentiality maintained?

All data will be collected anonymously using a four digit non-identifiable participant number. No identifying information (e.g. names, schools or services involved) will be taken.

The data will be stored in a secure, password protected location on the researcher's laptop, to which no one else will have access. The recordings and transcription will be destroyed once the project has been submitted (approximately 2015).

I am interested in hearing your views and would like to record your comments, making notes on some of your ideas, thoughts and feelings during the session. I want to assure you all of the discussions we would have would be reported anonymously. No-one will be able to tell who said what. I hope that this means you would feel able to speak freely. Your views are valuable and will help to influence any future educational information, training, interventions and research in the area of adoption.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

Will I be paid for participating in the research?

The researcher and the University of Manchester are not able to offer any payment for participation in this study.

What is the duration of the research?

Commitment to take part would be one hour and a half.

Where will the research be conducted?

DATE ----- VENUE ----- TIME-----.

The planning and feedback sessions will also be held at this venue.

Will the outcomes of the research be published?

An anticipated outcome of the research is that results may contribute to a piece of published research within the LA or University.

Criminal Records Check

The researcher has undergone a Criminal Records Bureau check at the Enhanced Disclosure level.

Contact for further information

Researcher contact: Jo Lyons, email: Jo.lyons@.....gov.uk

Supervisor contact: Dr Garry Squires, email: garry.squires@manchester.ac.uk

What if something goes wrong?

If there are any issues regarding this research that you would prefer not to discuss with members of the research team, please contact the Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator by either writing to 'The Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator, Research Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL', or by emailing: Research-Governance@manchester.ac.uk, or by telephoning 0161 275 7583 or 275 8093.

The development of guidance to support communication between adoptive parents and school staff

FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

| | Please initial box |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above study and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily. | |
| 2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. | |
| 3. I understand that the focus group will be audio-recorded. | |
| 4. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes. | |
| 5. I understand that all personal details will be treated confidentially and that all names and other identifiers will be removed. | |
| 6. I understand that my details below will be destroyed when the project has terminated. | |
| 7. I consent to take part in the Focus Group to explore parents' views on information exchange with school staff with the aim of producing supportive guidance. | |

I agree to take part in the above project

| | | |
|--|---------------|--------------------|
| _____ Name of participant | _____ Date | _____ Signature |
| _____ Name of person taking consent | _____ Date | _____ Signature |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |

APPENDIX 8 Advantages of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 97).

Flexibility.

Relatively easy and quick method to learn, and do.

Accessible to researchers with little or no experience of qualitative research.

Results are generally accessible to educated general public.

Useful method for working within participatory research paradigm, with participants as collaborators.

Can usefully summarize key features of a large body of data, and/or offer a 'thick description' of the data set.

Can highlight similarities and differences across the data set.

Can generate unanticipated insights.

Allows for social as well as psychological interpretations of data.

Can be useful for producing qualitative analyses suited to informing policy development.

APPENDIX 9: Phased approach to Thematic Analysis [Braun and Clarke, 2006]

| | Phase | Process | This research |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| 1 | Familiarising yourself with your data | Transcribing, reading, re-reading, making notes, initial ideas. | I alone transcribed [verbatim] all data to reduce ambiguity preserve confidentiality and to begin to familiarise myself with the content. This involved repeated listening to the recordings, re-reading, checking and noting down initial areas of interest. |
| 2 | Generating initial codes | Coding interesting features of the data across the data set, collating data relevant to each code | I examined each transcription. Texts were divided into segments of information, the segments of information labelled with initial codes and these codes further refined. The process involved a pragmatic approach within inductive and deductive processes. [ie. Using the themes from the conceptual framework yet being open to emerging themes and connections]. |
| 3 | Searching for themes | Collating codes into potential themes | I analysed the codes and considered how different codes may combine to form overarching themes, using maps and theme piles. |
| 4 | Reviewing themes | Checking themes against coded extracts and the entire data set; generating a thematic map of the analysis | I checked and reviewed the collated extracts for the themes. Thematic maps were developed and reworked. I considered the validity of individual themes. I checked that the thematic maps reflected the meanings within the text. |
| 5 | Defining and naming themes | Refine the specifics of each theme; refine the overall story told by the analysis; clearly define each theme | The themes and subthemes were refined, analysed and cross referenced with the overall data set. The themes were named and checked. I sought to clearly define these for the reader. |
| 6 | Producing the report | Relating analysis back to the research questions and literature; producing a scholarly report with vivid and compelling extract examples | Within this thesis, specific quotes were selected to provide evidence of the themes to illustrate the story and posit the findings within the theoretical framework and research questions. |

Example of segmenting data: The data was segmented when specific sections of text appeared to allude to a single point or factor

| Transcript | Initial coding |
|--|--|
| <i>I remember saying to the teacher: “</i> | Parent telling Interaction with teacher |
| <i>he needs to know what’s happening, when I’ll be back” Because, it was like “mummy will come for you at lunchtime” or it could be “mummy will come after school” or “after lunch” or ... whatever. They staggered the whole induction process to school.</i> | Child anxiety Attachment issues Parent’s view about what the child needs |
| <i>And I said to her “he needs to know I’m coming back”</i> | Parent telling the teacher Parent giving ideas to the teacher Parent’s view about what the child needs |
| <i>Oh, they’re all like that, he’ll be totally fine, don’t worry, he won’t break”</i> | Parent’s view that the teacher was dismissive of child’s needs |

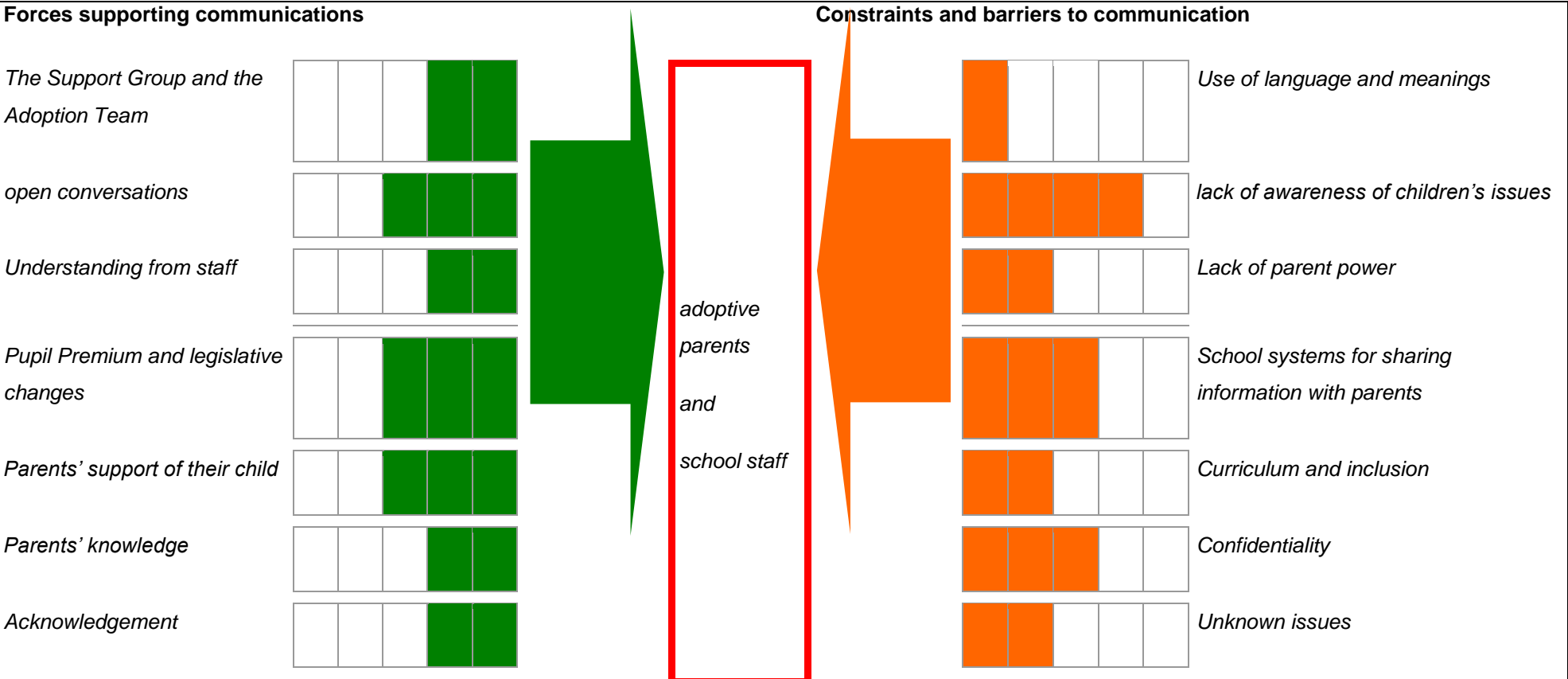
| | |
|--|--|
| | Parent's view that the teacher was dismissive of parent's opinion. |
| <i>"Well, he didn't know that I'd come back, ...</i> | Attachment Anxiety |
| <i>.And I didn't want that happening at school.</i> | Parent's anxiety |
| <i>But she didn't get it. Didn't realise that he really, truly would worry that I wouldn't be back...</i> | Parent's view that the teacher did not understand the needs of the child |
| <i>I remember I didn't know what to do, who to talk with about it at school.</i> | Problems knowing who to talk to in school |
| <i>I talked with the adoption team and they said to try to talk to the SENCo at school... I made an appointment.</i> | Use of adoption support |
| <i>She was brilliant. Said, "oh we didn't realise he would feel it like that"</i> | Teacher acknowledge lack of problem understanding |
| <i>and she wanted to know what we would do, what we did at home to settle him. And what we wanted to happen at school.</i> | Parent's views asked for. |

APPENDIX 10: Checklist of criteria for good thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 96).

| Process | Number | Criteria | This research |
|---------------|--------|--|---|
| Transcription | 1 | The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for 'accuracy'. | I was an active participant in the data gathering and transcription processes. Focus groups and interviews were recorded, transcribed by me and re-checked. This active participation and immersion in the data helped build familiarisation with the sets. |
| Coding | 2 | Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process. | All data sets were checked, read, re-read and coded. |
| | 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. | I sought to ensure that the process was thorough, inclusive and comprehensive. I was careful to gather evidence that the deductive issues were evident in the data so as not to impose codes. |
| | 4 | All relevant extracts for all each theme have been collated. | Codes were produced for each theme. |
| | 5 | Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set. | I checked and reviewed the collated extracts for the themes. |
| | 6 | Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive. | Thematic maps were developed, reworked, checked and defined. |
| Analysis | 7 | Data have been analysed - interpreted, made sense of - rather than just paraphrased or described. | I sought to ensure that the extracts are illustrative and supportive of analytical points, going beyond simple descriptions. |
| | 8 | Analysis and data match each other - the extracts illustrate the analytic claims. | I sought to make sure that the analyses |

| | | | |
|----------------|----|---|--|
| | | | matched and were consistent with the data extracts. I considered other readings, variations and contradictions. |
| | 9 | Analysis tells a convincing and well-organized story about the data and topic. | I sought to do this and organise the whole written thesis in a way that would both guide and interest the reader. |
| | 10 | A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided. | I sought to analyse what was interesting about the extracts and why to drive a coherent narrative. |
| 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. | The analysis was thorough from the outset of immersion within the data across the stages. |
| Written report | 12 | The assumptions about, and specific approach to, thematic analysis are clearly explicated. | I sought to explicate and clarify these in the Methodology and Results Chapters. |
| | 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. | The Methodology and Results Chapters co-align in relation to descriptions and analyses. |
| | 14 | The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis. | My epistemological position is grounded in the approaches described. |
| | 15 | The researcher is positioned as active in the research process; themes do not just 'emerge'. | I recognise and have been explicit about my personal and professional knowledge and experience in the research and the influences therein. |

APPENDIX 11: Force field analysis: Strengthening and inhibiting forces in communications between adoptive parents and school staff.



APPENDIX 12: Force field analysis questions and prompts. The following questions are adapted from Coghlan and Brannick (2010, p. 77).

Explain the purpose of force field analysis.

What are the issues that help and support communications between you as adoptive parents and school staff?

What are the problems / constraints / barriers to communication?

How powerful are these forces?

Considering all the aspects we have discussed this evening, which do you feel are most important?

So, to summarise, we have discussed

It was suggested by ... and agreed by many that

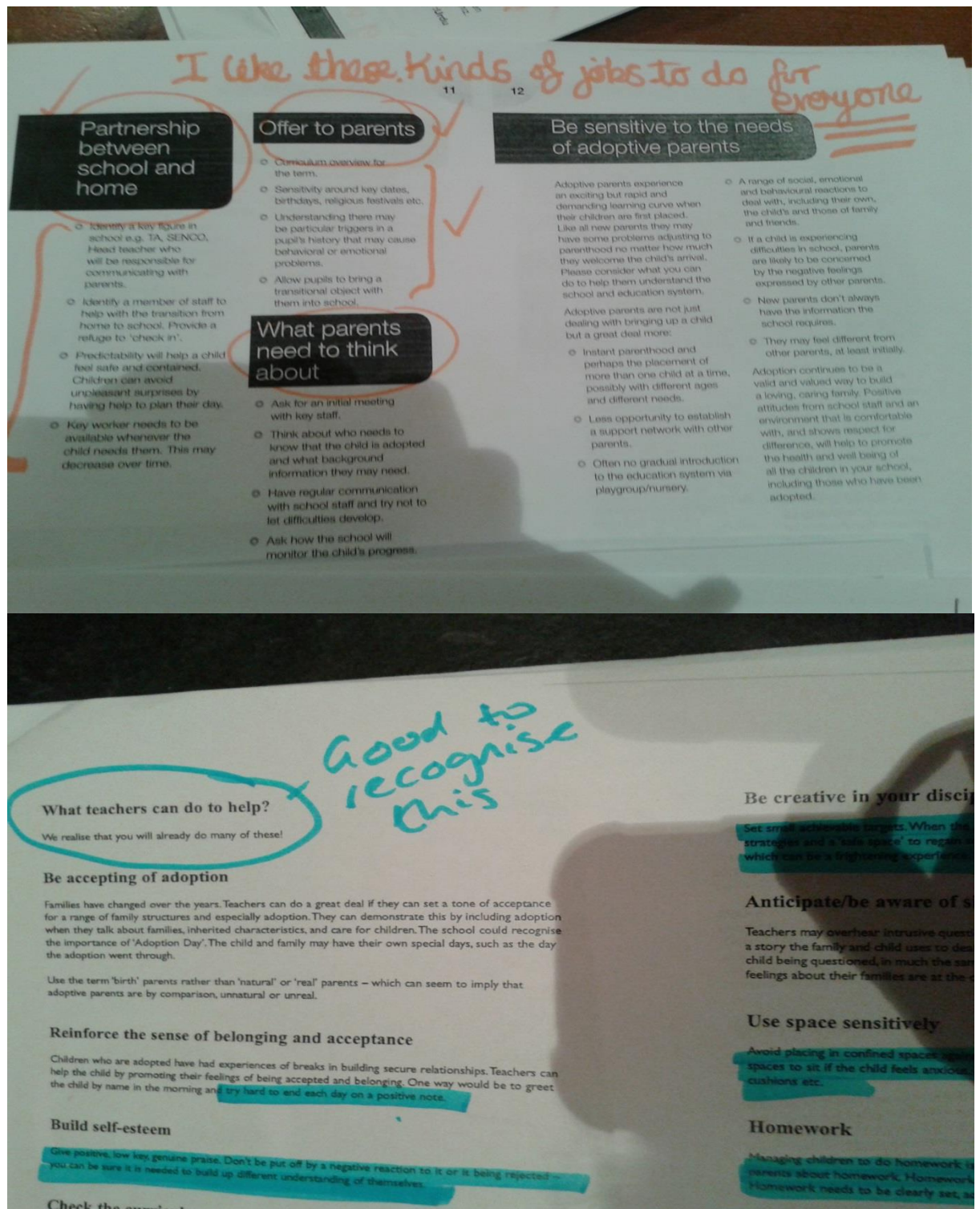
The issues have been grouped under different areas ...

The main issues are as shown

Does what we have constructed here seem to summarised what was mentioned as the important issues?

Anything else? [reiterate assurances of confidentiality and consent].

APPENDIX 13: Extracts from examples of information sharing guidance that has been highlighted and commented upon.



APPENDIX 14: Guidance on types and purposes of focus group questions [adapted from Hennink et al., 2011, p. 143]

| Question type | Purpose |
|----------------------------------|---|
| <i>Introduction</i> | Provide information on expectations and ethical boundaries, set the scene. |
| <i>Broad opening questions</i> | Provide rapport, allow for ease into the topic, open contributions, enable participants to feel comfortable to move into specifics following: |
| <i>Specific questions</i> | Allow for richer data on topic. |
| <i>Closing questions</i> | Provide closure |
| <i>Post-discussion questions</i> | Provide information, reiterate ethics. |
| | |

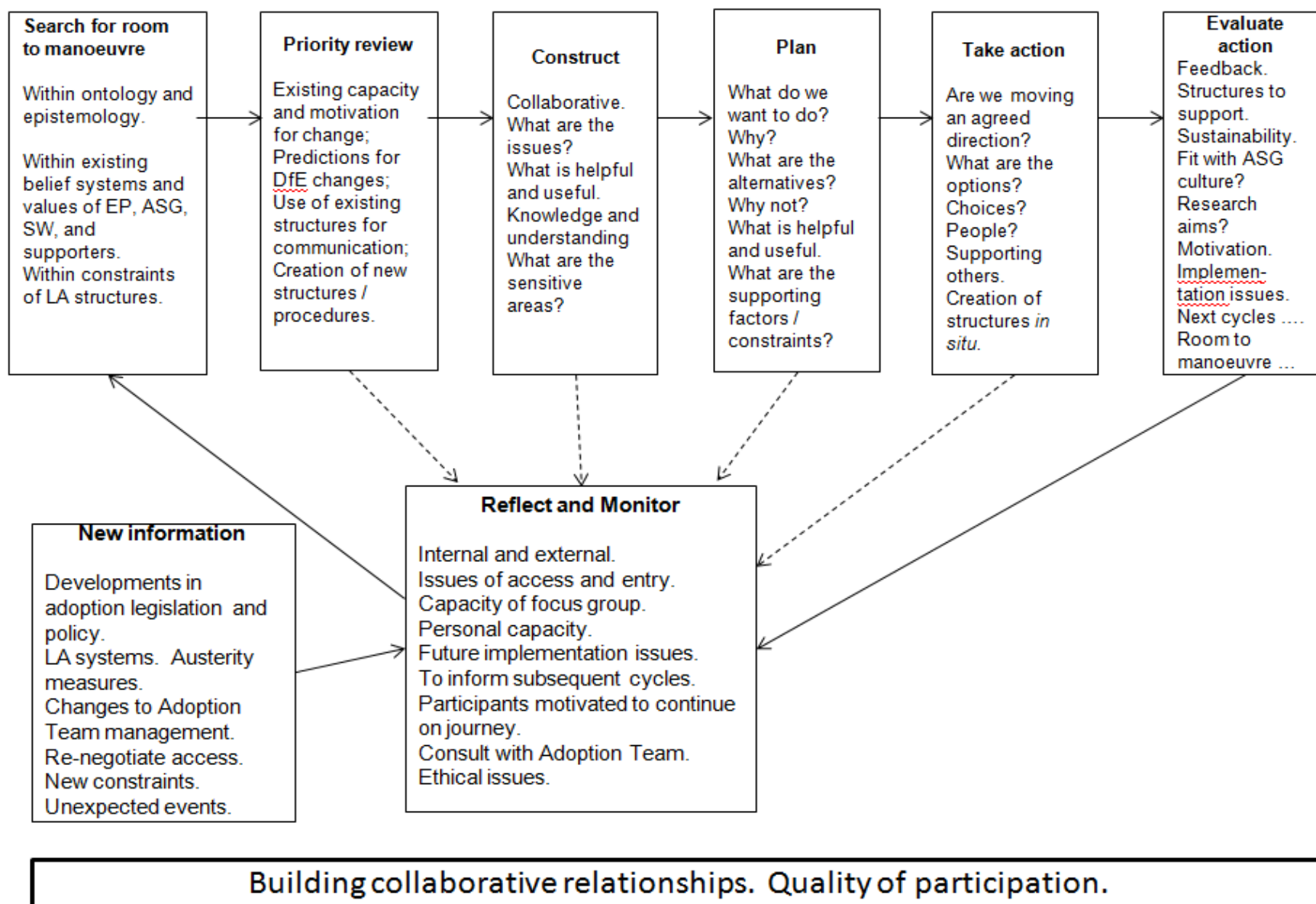
APPENDIX 15: Action Research framework used for the development of the guidance

[Framework adapted from McNiff et al. (2003, p. 58)].

| Guiding questions and prompts | Focus group response [Phase 3] |
|---|---|
| Where are we up to? What are we doing now? What is going on for us at the moment? | <i>Group: We've developed draft guidance.</i> |
| What do we want to do? What do we want to do differently? Why? What are our preferred outcomes? What is our desired future?" | <i>Need to use it. Want to make a script. Support the use of the guidance. Help at a meeting. Help keep calm. Help focus on the child.</i> |
| What could we do? Alternatives? | <i>Adoptive parents may not wish to use a script. They may want to develop their own. They may not want to use it. In conversation with school staff. In letters about the children. In a formal way, like a report. Using a form, like IEP. Using a prepared form with parts filled in by us. With a leaflet that tells what problems they have.</i> |
| What do we plan to do? Why? Identify ideas for improvements. What we might need. | <i>Specific helpful words to use to help parents introduce why they want to use the guidance. Opportunity to help explain clearly what is going on. Might help them tell more about child. Forget things when nervous. Forget things unless you plan it.</i> |
| Take action. Thinking of wording. Guided role play scripts. How did it seem? | <i>Developing wording that works. Words that are practical. Wouldn't feel silly using. Not awkward. Trying it out – reading to a partner and swapping roles. Try it out with teachers. J and A to try it out.</i> |
| <i>Later</i> How did it go? Reflect on and review what we have done. Evaluation. | <i>Later I liked it. I tried it with SENCo at school. So it was useful to do anyway. But it went, it was the right thing to do for me. Didn't cry. Said what I wanted to say. I could listen better. It made it easier for me to listen to her. I came out of it feeling better. About myself really.</i> |

| | |
|--|--|
| | <p><i>And about XXX. Because I didn't get upset. I didn't have to control my breathing to keep from crying.</i></p> <p><i>So, yes. I would do it. I want to do it when XXX moves up. Before he moves up. I think they'll get it.</i></p> |
| <p>What next? Keep going with ...</p> <p>Monitor. Make changes next action</p> | <p><i>Changewords from to</i></p> <p><i>J. and A. try for next T when X and Y move up classes.</i></p> <p><i>B. for when XXX goes to XXX.</i></p> <p><i>Introduce to more adopters.</i></p> <p><i>Discuss at the ASG.</i></p> <p><i>More SWs need to know. J and B to arrange meeting.</i></p> |

APPENDIX 16: 'A model for managing complex action research settings' [adapted from Wallace, 1991, p. 201].



APPENDIX 17: Timeline of research tasks

| Date | Action |
|------------|--|
| | <i>On-going:</i> Reviewed research literature. Continued to keep up-to-date with changes in Adoption legislation, SEND and related sources. Collated existing information-sharing documentation. Monitored these changes and implications for practice. |
| | Phase 1. Project Construction and Planning |
| Sept 2012 | Negotiating access and entry. Research Commissioned with management, i.e. Principal EP / Adoption Team. |
| | <i>Delays as discussed in Section 6.1.1.</i> |
| April 2013 | Re-visit Adoption Team to discuss Thesis Proposal. Authorisation from Management. Enlist co-worker from within Adoption Team. The [Adoption Support Social Worker] supporter and I met to discuss the planning and preparation of the initial focus group. I went to the meeting with draft ideas for discussion. |
| June 2013 | Following approval requested volunteer members for the research Focus Groups. This was achieved via letters written by me, but sent out by the Adoption Team to ensure adoptive parents' anonymity of contact details. |
| Sept 2013 | Meeting with supporter to confirm arrangements for initial focus group. |
| Oct 2013 | Focus Group [FG1] At the start of each Focus Group, further copies of the information about the research on a [blank] consent letter were given, with assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. FG1 Adoptive parents explored key issues, the challenges and opportunities for information sharing, and considered desirable and non-desirable characteristics of information sharing systems. Reflection on currently used processes of information exchange. What do adoptive parents want to share with school staff? Transcribe data. |
| Nov 2013 | Semi-structured interviews of two adoptive parents explored what they presently tell or want to share with school staff. This aim was to provide richer contextual information. Transcribe. Thematic analysis. |
| Jan 2014 | Focus Group [FG2] Force field analysis as a tool for the Group. - what are the strengthening and inhibiting forces for the change? |
| Jan 2014 | Working Party [WP1] edit of Force Field Thematic analysis. |
| | Phase 2. Design / collaborative action |
| March 2014 | Researcher feedback to Focus Group [FG3] re force field analysis. Consideration of key factors. FG3 reflected on content, processes and plans for implementation prior to developing drafts. FG3 considered several examples of other information sharing guides. What is useful / needed and why? The group developed ideas for draft form. Transcribe data. Thematic analysis. |
| March 2014 | Working Party [WP2] integrated the ideas into drafts to present at the next focus group. |
| | Phase 3. Evaluation |

| | |
|----------------|--|
| May 2014 | Focus Group [FG4] further developed drafts of desirable guidance and documentation for use by adoptive parents in their communications with school staff. The Group considered how the potential resource could be used, how it may benefit parents and the drawbacks to its use. A draft script was drawn up by the group to aid the use of the resource. Plans for implementation. |
| | Phase 4 <i>Implementation</i> |
| July 2014 | Working Party [WP3] to further refine drafts. Trials and on-going plans for implementation. |
| ongoing | It is anticipated that the 'holders' of the documentation would remain the adoptive parents and they would make decisions regarding its use with their adopted children. |

APPENDIX 18: Participants' involvement in research tasks

| Research task | Participants |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Working party | <i>Consisted of me, the supporter [Adoption Support Team Social Worker] and an adoptive parent. [The latter was unable to attend each session].</i> |
| WP1 | Me and the supporter. |
| WP2 | Me and the supporter. |
| WP3 | Me, the supporter and an adoptive parent [a volunteer from the initial Focus Group, FG1] |
| Semi-structured interviews | 2 separate interviews of 2 adoptive parents. |
| | SSI 020 Adoptive parent |
| | SSI 021 Adoptive parent |
| Focus groups | |
| FG1 | FG 001 Adoptive parent |
| 8 participants | FG 002 Adoptive parent |
| | FG 003 Adoptive parent |
| | FG 004 Adoptive parent |
| | FG 005 Adoptive parent |
| | FG 006 Adoptive parent |
| | FG 007 Adoptive parent |
| | FG 008 Adoptive parent |
| FG2 | FG 002 Adoptive parent |
| 5 participants | FG 003 Adoptive parent |
| | FG 004 Adoptive parent |
| | FG 006 Adoptive parent |
| | FG 008 Adoptive parent |
| FG3 | FG 001 Adoptive parent |
| 8 participants | FG 002 Adoptive parent |
| | FG 003 Adoptive parent |
| | FG 004 Adoptive parent |
| | FG 005 Adoptive parent |
| | FG 006 Adoptive parent |
| | FG 007 Adoptive parent |
| | FG 008 Adoptive parent |
| FG4 | FG 002 Adoptive parent |
| 6 participants | FG 003 Adoptive parent |
| | FG 004 Adoptive parent |
| | FG 006 Adoptive parent |
| | FG 007 Adoptive parent |
| | FG 008 Adoptive parent |

APPENDIX 19: Raw data. Extract from Focus Group 1 and initial codes

| Focus Group 1 extract | Initial Codes |
|--|--|
| <i>[Parent] FG 001</i> | |
| My first issue with school was the settling in process. | Settling in school |
| I can remember when... When he started school. | Starting school |
| They did it where they went in ... it was when they had mixed it so they went in for half a day here and half a day there, | Gradual school starting procedures |
| with mixed groups and classes and teachers. | Mix of peer groups, staff |
| They didn't have a set class for three weeks, which | No set class group |
| Which was hell. | Emotive language Emotions |
| Just couldn't settle, | Problems settling to school Effect on child |
| his behaviour was all over the place. | Behaviour |
| I didn't really know what to do. | feeling uncertain problems knowing who to talk to Negative experience |
| He was my first child. I'd only been a parent for about a year, | New parent. confidence |
| so I didn't really feel I knew enough about school to say anything. But it wasn't good. | [Lack of] knowledge of school How to approach staff Interaction with staff Parent school relationship |
| I did know enough about him and what he needed. and And he didn't need that. | Parent knowledge of child |
| He needed to know where he was, what he was doing, when I'd be back. | Parent's view about what the child needs Attachment Separation from parent Child's needs Effect on child |
| <i>[parent] FG 002</i> | |
| I don't know if any of you have had this? | Sharing experiences, asking about commonalities? Shared knowledge |
| But X had a learning log to do. Do you have those at your schools? They're like meant to be fun homework, finding out stuff together. Actually, it's really like our homework. It can be a pain, you know, getting them to do it. .. | Homework issues |
| anyway, we had this homework that said: "do a timeline of your life so far". | Life story |
| You know? I mean, how could we do that? | Mismatch of homework? Inappropriate request? Lack of knowledge of staff |
| 'Well, 0-3 years of age was hell | Abuse and neglect Life story |
| and then I moved and then I moved and moved to ...you know.... Then I was adopted ...blah blah. '. | Disruptions to early life life story work |
| It's just not the sort of 'fun thing' you can write down is it. | Inappropriate Lack of understanding Confidentiality |
| I mean, everyone else would be putting. 'Learnt to sit up, smiled, walked, talked,.... And dates'. | Difference with peers |
| For a start we don't know those things. And, for God's sake, what about all the bad stuff? do we leave it out and start life from 3? | Abuse and neglect Life story Parent concerns of child |
| Do you know? | Asking for confirmation Similarities in experience |
| It just hadn't been thought through. | Lack of thought and planning by school staff |
| And if we did do that, then we'd do it in a careful way not for | Inappropriate curriculum content |

| | |
|---|---|
| homework and not in a school book that can go anyway and other children can see. Now normally the teacher would be careful about family tree stuff and ,.... | Curriculum needs |
| To give the [sic] due, this was the first thing to happen for a long while. | Positive comment about school |
| [parent] FG 003 | |
| We've had photos and stuff.. like in Reception. Well, we haven't got any baby photos. The photos start when he was with foster carers when he was two and a half | Life story Curriculum |
| [parent] FG 004 | |
| Yes, like the other things in ... to do with school work. We've had to talk to him about not needing to draw everybody's picture to do with his family. See, like, he would draw his birth mum, and his foster mum and me, and the school were, like, "We didn't mean him to do that". But, I said, "Well, if you say to him, 'do all your family, do everybody in your family,' then that's what will come out". | Life story Curriculum needs Child's interpretations Parent concerns of child |
| Then, he doesn't tell them what he means. He just keeps quiet and it takes a bit to work out what's going on with him | Difficulties of child communicating needs |
| and it just gets to the stage where we're having to tell them again, and again, | Parents informing staff Repeating information |
| "Please would you tell me when you're going to do family stuff, then I can prepare him. | Parent staff information sharing |
| Tell me what you're going to say to the class, what you're going to ask them to do, then ... I mean, just think about it. | Planning to help child |
| He's only little. He doesn't need this stress." I don't need this stress. | Stress of child Stress of parent |
| I would prefer it if they kept family stuff out of it. I know there are other families like that. | The family in the curriculum confidentiality |
| [parent] FG 005 | |
| We had a strange thing. Mothers' Day. | Special days in the curriculum |
| He'd been horrendous for weeks. I had no idea what was going on. Previously, there could be a reason for it. Couldn't pin it down. Had no idea what was going on. | Child's difficulties |
| And then, ... it was Mother's Day Assembly. | |
| And the teacher talked about [gesture to chest] ... I had tears streaming down my cheeks. | Parent emotions Experiences |
| He was stood like that, head down | |
| and the teacher's going on, " ooh, you all came out of your mummies' tummies". The full, ... and there was just no differentiation whatsoever. | [Lack of] understanding of staff knowledge |
| And he just had this sad little face. Couldn't look up. | Child's emotions |
| He had this thing to read out and it was just not suitable for him to read. | Inappropriate curriculum content |
| And it was horrendous. Absolutely horrendous. | Parent emotions |
| And I did go in. And I did speak very nicely to them. " | Parent communicated with staff |
| He's only Reception and it was really not appropriate, and did you not think..." | Parent informed staff |
| [parent] FG 004 | |
| And did they not think about that? | Parent showing agreement |
| [parent] FG 005 | |
| I'd had to deal with three weeks building up to this. And I had another, at least a month, | Child's difficulties Hard to deal with |
| before we got back to him wanting to go to school happily. You know, tripping off happily to school, when before it was horrendous in the mornings. And at night, too. He'd cry about | Problems going to school Child anxiety re school |

| | |
|---|--|
| going to school. | |
| He couldn't really say what he felt and ... | Child's problems expressing feelings |
| I didn't want to go on about it. | Problems talking to staff |
| I just had to keep reassuring him and, you know, keep him close and safe. Eventually, he went tripping back off again. | Parent keeping child safe Secure |
| Til the next time. Because you know stuff will come up again, when they've not thought it through enough. | Recurring problem of inappropriate curriculum confidentiality |
| And he's not the only child. There are others adopted, or in care, when that wouldn't be appropriate. He's not the only child who doesn't live with his birth mum. | Other children in similar situation |
| "Oh yes, we'll try and change the wording." | Staff assurance of improvement Feeling of being listened to |
| They didn't. Two years later, with my daughter. | Problem recurring |
| So, they don't think. | Feeling of being let down? Trust? Negative experience |
| <i>[parent] FG 005</i> | |
| I know We've had things, ... The children in the war, you know, the evacuees. Erm, about people, erm, people having problems with, er, children going, er, when it's the war, the evacuees. And they've been talking about, you know, how it was leaving their families, and how they got to see them and all was fine after it. And how they had to live with other people. And how it was a bit exciting and a bit, well they were from the city and going to the country and crying for their mums and then it would be over and they'd be back. "You're going to leave your mums and dads and you're going to get new mums and dads..." | Curriculum content |
| You won't see your mums or dads for a long while. We need to keep you safe." | similar to experiences of child life story |
| It freaked her out. But ... | Child's emotions |
| EP So the curriculum things have come up. Mothers' Day, Lifestory, timelines, family trees, are there any other things? | EP comment |
| <i>[parent] FG 006</i> | |
| Moving classes. Transitions and things. | Transitions and change |
| <i>[parent] FG 007</i> | |
| Moving school, new teachers and things. I've found ... things you say. Some things are better in some classes. | Transitions and change +ve experience |
| It doesn't help. Really awkward, actually. | Negative experiences Emotions |
| <i>[parent] FG 008</i> | |
| Every year at the end of the year, you know, summer time, his work does that [<i>indicates downward slope with arm</i>]. I think, it's because he doesn't know what class he's going to. There are two they can go into. Because it's double intake, double class. And they mix them up a bit, so, there's a lot really. They might not be with their friends; they don't know which teacher; which classroom. And they don't know until a week before they finish. | Transitions change friendships |
| And I've spoke [<i>sic</i>] to the SENCo about it. I've spoke to the Head about it.... | Parent initiated with staff |
| every year, I've told them, | Parent repeated request of staff |
| "Could you just let me know?" | Request for staff to inform parent |
| He's like this... It affects him really badly | Child's difficulties Impact on child |
| and I just want to keep him on track, keep him settled." | Parent keeping child safe Secure |
| Every year, I've told them. | Parent repeated request of staff |
| "And his work will settle down, and his behaviour. Just let me | Request for staff to inform |

| | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| know.” | parent |
| Never happened. | Negative experience Trust ? |
| He needs to know what's happening and gets anxious when ... when it's all uncertain about what's going on, what's going to happen. | Child's needs Transition |
| SW | |
| one of the main issues is and just how early life experiences impact on that and, ... that's about attachment and .. I would have thought trainee teachers would know about attachment, but they don't when I have been in schools. It's getting teachers to understand how it's attachment... and it's going on for them. It's going on for them still even though they were adopted and the abuse and neglect have stopped. | Social worker comment |

APPENDIX 20: Example of organising, overarching and preliminary themes

| Overarching themes | subthemes | Basic and preliminary themes | Example quotes |
|------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Process and enabling factors | Parental involvement Partnership | Parent school relationship Partnerships Sharing information and knowledge Points of contact Positive and negative experiences of interactions | <i>she wanted to know what we would do, what we did at home to settle him. And what we wanted to happen at school. Information passed on you find yourself explaining it again. They need to understand it. What it's like.</i> |
| | School culture | inclusion Curriculum transitions knowledge of attachment impact of life story and history | <i>I didn't really know what to do Other children too Settling into class They need to really think about what might be going on for these kids when they plan a topic. Getting used to her new teacher. Can't settle down. if anything is likely to come up. ... then we could at least prepare them.</i> |
| | Support Knowledge and awareness | Practical help key staff knowledge of staff child's needs Support groups Emotional support Responsibilities Keeping the children safe Informing children | <i>Group helps it makes you feel responsible, like it's my fault, it's not like it's secret, but it's private her needing to trust the adult, feel secure</i> |

Handwritten notes on a piece of paper, likely a mind map or flowchart, discussing themes related to communication, information, and support. The notes are written in red and black ink.

Top Section:

- helps in communication
- Information informed
- power imbalance?

Left Side (Vertical Flow):

- asked for help from P.
- prepare / inform
- are support
- child exp in school
- transition
- curriculum / curriculum sensitivity
- historical
- life story / re-telling
- telling / post exp.
- Confidentiality
- disclosures
- parent / ch

Central and Right Side (Complex Flow):

- in control
- learn together
- understand P
- Ch.
- worry
- How
- anxiety
- doesn't help comm
- need
- confidense
- personal info.
- language
- need
- respect lang. of
- show understand
- lang. show understanding & respect
- work out bel
- Ch described defiant, manipulative etc.
- high emotions
- we support ourselves
- we experiences
- we words
- parent anxiety stress
- back control
- ch. difficulties
- trust
- attachment reasons
- staff
- sensitivity
- knowledge

Other Notes:

- advice?
- System's share info
- help P w system
- need
- respect lang. of
- show understand
- lang. show understanding & respect
- work out bel
- Ch described defiant, manipulative etc.
- high emotions
- we support ourselves
- we experiences
- we words
- parent anxiety stress
- back control
- ch. difficulties
- trust
- attachment reasons
- staff
- sensitivity
- knowledge

APPENDIX 22: Meeting script to help structure the discussion between adoptive parents and school staff.

Fill in the Resource Guidance. The following are suggestions to help start the discussion off. You could maybe highlight the ones that are most relevant for you.

PRE-MEETING: I would like to arrange an appointment with [X's teacher / SENCo] to talk with them about X and her / his needs. There are some issues that are particularly sensitive. It would be good if we could meet for about an hour?

SCRIPT

WHY?

I am’s mum / dad. I/We adopted from care. I/We am/are part of an Adoption Support Group. We think that the children might sometimes experience some difficulties with school life. We have developed this Resource to help adoptive parents to share information about our children and raise awareness of their needs.

It would be a good idea to have a discussion about and maybe go through the different sections with you.

THE SECTIONS: SUMMARY

This section gives a summary

CURRICULUM

This section talks about topics and situations that might come up in lessons. Give examples for your child. e.g. for s/he would have difficulties doing a timeline or family tree as her / his background is complicated. e.g. s/he does not have any baby photos / memory stories.....e.g. stories about ... might need to be used sensitively ...

CONFIDENTIALITY

There are safeguarding / sensitive / confidentiality issues for due to

SOME PROBLEMS

We think it is useful that you know these things. [e.g. trust, control, etc.]

WHAT HELPS

We have filled in _Section to think about how to help

NEXT TIME

Perhaps we could talk at a convenient time about how you think staff could help ... at school. You might want to think about the things we’ve talked about today and plan another time. We know that there is a lot here. We might be able to think about how you think I / we can help at home. Thanks for the time you have given today to help

Helping adopted children and their families

This resource has been designed to encourage collaboration between adoptive parents and education staff by raising awareness of the needs of adopted children who may experience some difficulties with school life.

Well, you've adopted him and things are going to be ok now for him, aren't they?

Adopted children have been removed from their birth parents and taken into care mostly due to abuse and neglect. Early experiences affect the way that the brain develops and research suggests long-lasting effects when children have been separated from their attachment figures and are unable to develop nurturing relationships during their early lives. Healthy attachments help children feel safe, calm and secure, and are vital for their emotional, social, physical, and learning development. Children who have been adopted may have experienced relational trauma and loss, for example of their birth relatives, their carers, their homes, previous schools and their belongings. Relationships in school are important and can provide a secure base for learning to develop.

School Curriculum

Although schools are used to children coming from a variety of family backgrounds, there are some projects and school events which can pose particular difficulties for adopted children. It is useful for school staff to be sensitive about areas which may cause difficulties for children and discuss strategies with the parents who will know what works and what does not work for their children. The curriculum needs thinking about to avoid causing unnecessary stress. Particular areas that may need tactful handling include: Family Trees, Mothers' Day cards, autobiographies, grandparent interviews, baby pictures and early memory stories. For older children, subjects like biology, psychology and drama can cause anxiety.

- Family trees. Children may not have information and may not wish to talk or write about their history. Children may have feelings of confusion and shame about how to represent their complicated origins. How to represent their origins may cause a dilemma.
- Autobiographies / 'All about me'. Asking a child to write about 'my earliest memory' or something similar may trigger unwelcome behaviour. Develop alternative presentations of information. Children may have incomplete information about themselves.

Family tree: "He thought he needed to include everyone: his birth parents, foster carers, half siblings. He became really upset and this lasted for several weeks without us knowing what it was."

"She doesn't know things like how old she was when she first started to walk."

- Baby photos / memorabilia. Children may have none of these or they may be photos taken in Social Service settings with birth parents. There will be a need to be sensitive around their birthdays.
- Development, Health and Sex Education. Some lessons may evoke feelings of shame about their birth family due to possible substance misuse, including their own prenatal development and subsequent related difficulties. Some children or their birth siblings may have experienced sexual abuse. School staff may not be aware of this due to confidentiality issues. Discussions about parenting and one's own childhood experiences need sensitive handling. Topics such as drug or alcohol abuse may raise fears for adopted children about the well-being of members of their birth family who have had these difficulties and may serve as painful reminders of circumstances which may have brought the child into the care system in the first place. Adults in the child's birth family may be involved in such activity - a cause of anxiety for the child. Talk about adoption as another way of building a family to build acceptance of adoption and other family structures. Any discussion of inherited characteristics and medical histories will also need to be sensitively handled.
- Special Days: Mother's and Father's Day / Christmas / Birthdays. These may evoke complex feelings of confusion, loss and sadness as well as happiness.
- Literature. Stories and narratives are very valuable for exploring ideas in a safe, non-identifiable way. However, it is important to remain aware that some books may evoke complex memories. Some texts may be distressing, particularly on themes of loss, loneliness or death. Books about abandoned children or those where a child misbehaving is threatened with being taken into care will need to be carefully thought through [e.g. 'Goodnight Mr Tom', 'The Suitcase Kid', or 'Harry Potter'].
- Some charities talk about 'adoption' schemes for mistreated animals which may convey upsetting messages to adopted children. Consider using the term "sponsorship" rather than "adoption" on these occasions.

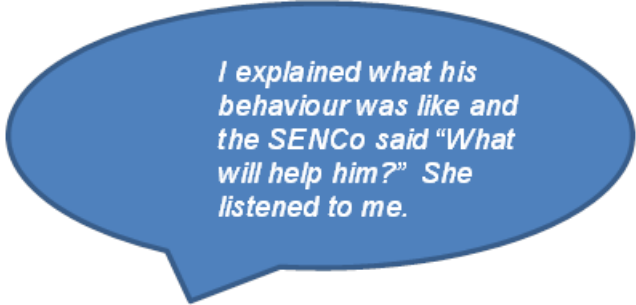
HOW TO HELP

School and home partnerships

Good communication between home and school is vital. School staff can help by thinking about who needs to know about the child's adoption background. They can identify a key person in school [an 'attachment figure'] to help provide reassurance and feelings of safety for the child. The attachment figure would be responsible for communication between home and school. Records will need to be kept confidential and safe. Many adoptive parents are new 'instant' parents when the children are placed which brings considerable challenges and they may sometimes feel different from other parents. Parents may find it helpful to discuss their child with school staff and make notes of their concerns before and during meetings. Parents may know of many triggers and have the strategies to share with staff.

Safety

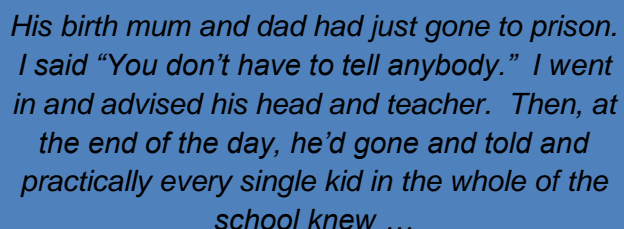
Photos of children taken in school but published in local papers may expose children to unwanted and possibly dangerous contact from their birth family.



I explained what his behaviour was like and the SENCo said "What will help him?" She listened to me.

Disclosing information

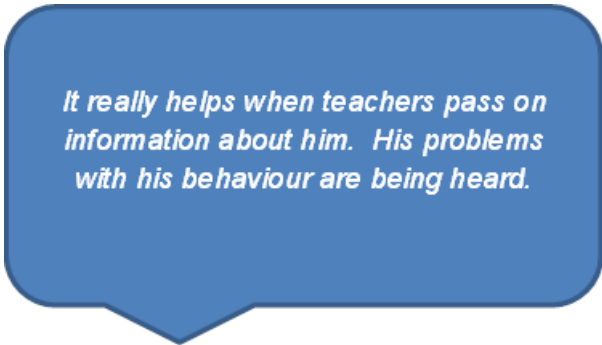
School staff may need to stop intrusive questions from others. If children disclose and reveal information about their background, they will need sensitive help. Personal revelations by children should be treated sensitively, with parents informed as soon as possible.



His birth mum and dad had just gone to prison. I said "You don't have to tell anybody." I went in and advised his head and teacher. Then, at the end of the day, he'd gone and told and practically every single kid in the whole of the school knew ...

Understand the child

Understanding trauma and attachment difficulties brings compassion and empathy; understanding that the child may be developmentally younger than their chronological age will guide teaching practices.



It really helps when teachers pass on information about him. His problems with his behaviour are being heard.

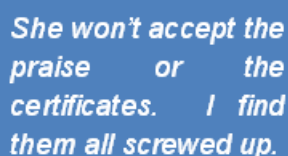
Trust and Control

Many children will find it hard to trust adults as they have been let down in the past by those who should have been able to look after them. Children with insecure attachments are scared of losing control and of being controlled by others. For them, control is about survival

We need to encourage them to trust adults and be dependent on them to meet their needs. A need for control may cause them to give the impression of independence [sometimes referred to as 'pseudo-independence']. When the child shows signs of behaviour difficulties, step in, give the child some strategies and a 'safe space' to regain self-control before it is lost. Help to reinforce the sense of belonging and acceptance.

Self-esteem

The development of self-esteem can be compromised by the children's past experiences and by continued stress and feelings of insecurity. Self-esteem includes feelings of security, being valued, a sense of belonging and confidence. It helps to give positive, low-key praise. It may be rejected, but it is needed to build up a different understanding of themselves. Help by acknowledging good decisions and choices and comment on the job well done rather than intrinsic characteristics.



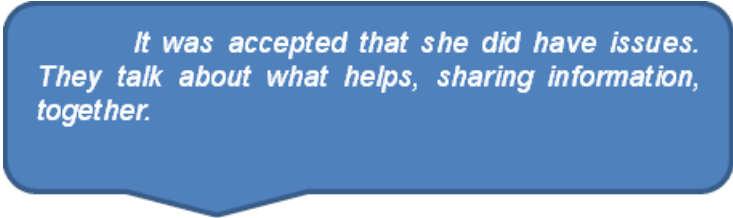
She won't accept the praise or the certificates. I find them all screwed up.

Receiving help

Children may refuse to be helped. Doing new work may be a particular challenge. This may not fit with their sense of self-worth, their need for control and their mistrust of adults.

They may take out their frustrations and low self-esteem about work on the adults around them.

Wonder aloud by describing their feelings for them. Adults around the child may need to help them to learn how to recognise their feelings and triggers. Expressing their own unrecognised needs can help children to comply with requests ["I see you need help with ..."]. As some children may not necessarily want to please adults, helping them comply will avoid power battles.



*It was accepted that she did have issues.
They talk about what helps, sharing information,
together.*

Lying, Stealing, Hiding.

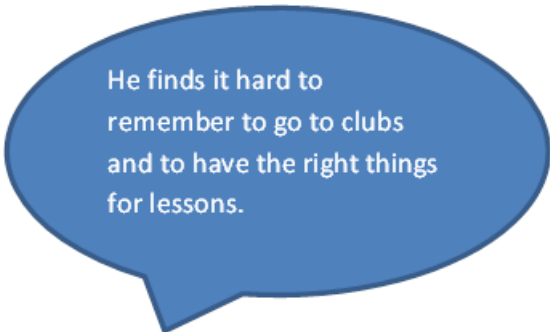
'Fight, flight, freeze' responses. Sometimes children are desperate to please others and fear the shame of being in trouble more than the motivation of telling the truth. Hiding is likely to be a coping strategy for dealing with overwhelming feelings and fears. Their emotional development [including conscience] may be at a much younger stage. This behaviour may also reflect their need for control.

Shame

Some children can feel a deep sense of shame, that they are a bad person. They may hide behind a 'shield of shame', which means they may tell lies, or blame other people, so that they do not have to suffer feelings of shame and self-disgust. It is healthier for children to feel guilty, that they made a mistake, not that they are bad, then they can learn from their mistakes.

Structure

Anxiety and hypervigilance can reduce concentration and cause problems processing and remembering instructions. Some children often have poor organisational and 'executive functioning' skills and need clear boundaries and expectations. Structure choices to remain in control. Offer choices with humour and creativity to avoid power battles; keep the child responding to you rather than allowing them to control the interaction.



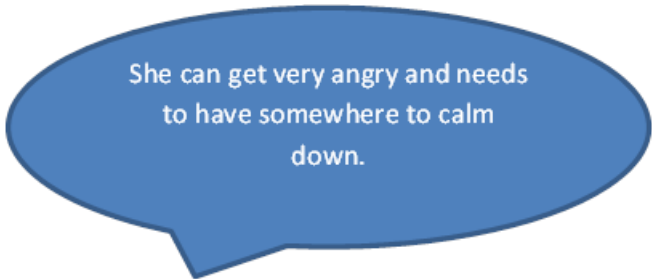
He finds it hard to
remember to go to clubs
and to have the right things
for lessons.

Changes and transitions

Some children may benefit from being allowed to bring transitional objects from home into school. Changes may school routine need to be supported. Beginnings and endings may be highly charged times – both big (end of school year, new teacher) and small (moving from one classroom to another, beginning of school week, end of lesson). Give low-key reminders about what is happening next, trying to help the child stay focused and relaxed. Children may need more time to re-attune and relax with parents when they come home from school.

Consequences and 'Time in, not time out'

Some children experience time out as yet more rejection, increasing their feelings of shame and worthlessness; time in keeps them connected and engaged in a relationship, helps with regulation. Use logical and natural consequences that relate to the problem behaviour and are designed to repair [e.g. damaged property or damaged relationships].



She can get very angry and needs
to have somewhere to calm
down.

CONFIDENTIAL PUPIL INFORMATION

My name is

Important people in my life

Things I like

My strengths

what people like about me

Things that are hard for me

How I communicate my needs

Things I dislike

Important things you need to know about me

[a bit about my past / topics and times that can upset me]

People can help me by ..

CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION.

Please consider carefully who you share this with and where this information is stored.

Further reading and support

websites

Adoption UK: www.adoptionuk.org.uk

BAAF (British Association for Adoption and Fostering). www.baaf.org.uk

The Nurture Group Network. www.nurturegroups.org

The Theraplay Institute is about building better relationships through play.

www.theraplay.org

Yellow Kite Attachment Support Service for Schools

www.theyellowkite.co.uk

National Children's Bureau - Understanding Why - Understanding attachment and how this can affect education with special reference to adopted children and young people and those looked after by local authorities. Available at

http://www3.hants.gov.uk/ncb_understanding_why1__2_.pdf

Books

Bomber, L.M. (2007). Inside I'm Hurting: Practical strategies for supporting children with attachment difficulties in schools. London: Worth Publishing.

Bomber, L.M. (2011). What about me? Inclusive strategies to help pupils with attachment difficulties make it through the school day. London: Worth Publishing.

Bomber, L.M. and Hughes, D. A. (2013). Settling to Learn: Settling Troubled Pupils to learn. Why Relationships Matter in School. London: Worth Publishing.

Cairns, K. (2002). Attachment, Trauma and Resilience: Therapeutic Caring for Children. BAAF.

Geddes, H. (2005). Attachment in the classroom: The link between children's early experience, emotional well-being and performance in school. London: Worth Publishing.

Hughes D. A. (1997). Facilitating Developmental Attachment: The road to emotional recovery and behavioural change in foster and adopted children. London: Aronson.

Hughes, D. A. (1998). Building the Bonds of Attachment: Awakening Love in Deeply Troubled Children. London: Aronson.

Perry, A. (Ed). (2009). Teenagers and Attachment: Helping adolescents engage with life and learning. London: Worth Publishing.

Books for children and families:

Sunderland, M. (2003). How Hattie Hated Kindness (Helping Children with Feelings). Speechmark Publishing Ltd.

Hoffman, M. (2011). The Great Big Book of Families. Dial Books.

<http://www.timpson.co.uk/shop/c/19/timpson-books/s/169/timpson-books/g/638/guides/p/57590/how-to-create-a-positive-future>

This booklet has been developed by adoptive parents, a social worker and an educational psychologist. It aims to encourage collaboration between adoptive parents and staff in education through raising awareness of the needs of some adopted children who may experience difficulties with school life.

Please note:

*The views expressed in this booklet are those of the authors and those who collaborated, and do not necessarily reflect those of ***** Local Authority. The examples and quotes from parents are genuine, but names and details have been changed to protect confidentiality.*

SPECIAL THANKS TO THE ADOPTIVE PARENTS WHO HAVE DEVELOPED THIS RESOURCE

If you require this leaflet in an alternative format, please contact:

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