WHEN SOCIETY ITCHES SCHOOLS MUST SCRATCH

IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES FACING THE MANAGEMENT OF FOSTER CHILDREN IN POST PRIMARY SCHOOLS

(The Case of Ireland)

A thesis presented to Institute of Education

for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Education is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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DEDICATION

To my Mother and Father who instilled in me a moral compass and a deep commitment to explore the cracks. Isn't that where the light gets in?

To our foster children, DonnaKate and Phoebe who have provided the impetus for this research. To Aine, my true north who has always been there with support, guidance and a kick or two when necessary. Love always. Finally, of course my boys, IggyDonal and Gareth Edward, who make me just want to do better every day.

It's all for you…..well it's for me but you know what I mean.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Dr. Martin Brown who kept guiding me back to the road when the ditch was calling me, continuously! Your patience and fortitude know no bounds, I salute you.

To all the interviewees who were kind enough to share their time for this novice researcher. I thank you all.

To Dr. Gerry McNamara who provided the initial spark.

Finally, to all the children that have by circumstance and chance found themselves in situations beyond their control. You deserve more than you receive.

In order to develop normally, a child requires progressively more complex joint activity with one or more adults who have an irrational emotional relationship with the child. Somebody's got to be crazy about that kid. That's number one. First, last and always.

Urie Bronfenbrenner

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Science (1997-2010)
DES	Department of Education and Skills (2010-present)
ECO	Emergency Care Order
EOHS	Emergency Out of Hours Service
EPIC	Empowering People in Care
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ERC	Educational Research Centre
FCO	Full Care Order
GAL	Guardian *ad Litem*
HIQA	Health Information and Quality Authority
HSCL	Home School and Community Liaison
HSE	Health Service Executive
ICO	Interim Care Order
IFCA	Irish Foster Care Association Ireland
ISPCC	Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
JCCYA	Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs
JCSP	Junior Certificate School Programme
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NEWB	National Educational Welfare Board.
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Assessment
PP&FS	Prevention, Partnership and Family Support
SCO	Special Care Order
SCP	School Completion Programme
SSP	School Support Programme
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on Rights of Child.
VFM	Value for Money

ABSTRACT

Title : **When Society itches, Schools must scratch**.
Identifying challenges facing the management of foster children in post primary schools.(The Case of Ireland)

Author: Daniel O'Sullivan.

This study examines the challenges facing the management of foster children in post-primary schools in Ireland through the lens of the various stakeholders (principals, teachers and social workers in the education of foster children). It also seeks to articulate how those charged with the educational remit may be enabled by evaluating the difficulties, identifying the stress points, and the resources required, to increase the effectiveness of teachers and improve the learning engagement of foster children.

The author presents a review of the literature by comparing the Irish experience with international practices to identify trends consistent and divergent with the different concepts of management and engagement of foster children and how these complementary, and at times contradictory, concepts have managed to influence the foster child's learning trajectory.

Finally, the study concludes by triangulating the primary research in an Irish context with both national and international literature to identify the main stress points and to propose workable solutions around resourcing and collaboration.

An adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological theory complemented by a socio-constructivist paradigm was considered the best approach which the author advanced by conducting concurrent exploratory qualitative research with semi-structured interviews of a cross-section of teachers, principals, and social workers.

Findings suggest that the school may be the only constant in a foster child's environment, and that the relationship between the teacher and foster child was more akin to a that of a counsellor and client. In addition, systematic barriers exist that may preclude engagement with the various stakeholders, and there is also a suggestion that the educational remit relies firmly on building relationships between the foster child and their various stakeholders, focussing on the education contract to facilitate the optimum conditions for success. The findings offer blended insights to evaluate the care system in context to inform policy, while empowering all stakeholders in the timely management of the foster child's learning experiences.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction and background

The topicality of foster child care in educational research in Ireland in 2018 is evidenced by an increasing volume of research from statutory bodies: Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) (2017), Department of Education and Skills (DES) (2016), Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) (2015), detailed adequacy reports from the Child and Family agency (*Tusla*), Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) inspection reports, advocates (The Irish Foster Care Association (IFCA); Empowering People In Care (EPIC); Barnados), and social care researchers and educationalists (Coulter 2013; McNicholas *et al.* 2011; Gilligan 2000). Whilst each of these stakeholder groups have varying functions, they have however, one goal in common which is how best to optimise a foster child's educational development. Most of this research has been produced in the last five years so there is no lack of enthusiasm and willingness to improve. However, the volume of research in a wide variety of contexts reflects the complexity of the issues that surround the education of children in foster care.

Variety is demonstrated by a cross section of recent Irish publications: Roarty *et al.* (2018) on permanence in aftercare, O'Brien and Cregan (2015) on a change agenda required for the provision of alternative care, McMahon, Conor & Curtin (2013) on the social networks of foster children, Darmody, McMahon, Banks (2013) on education of children in care, Brady and Dolan (2007) on exploring good practice in Irish child and family services, and advocate research (various reports by The Irish Foster Care Association (IFCA), Empowering People In Care (EPIC), Daly (2012), Barnados Annual Review 2012; 2017), statutory body research (Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs (JCCYA) (2017), Department of Education and Skills (DES) (2016), Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO), detailed adequacy reports from the Child and Family agency (*Tusla*)[1], and Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) inspection reports).

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[1] On the 1st of January 2014 the Child and Family Agency officially became an independent legal entity, comprising of the HSE Children and Family Services, the Family Support Agency and the National Educational Welfare Board, as well as incorporating some psychological services and a range of services responding to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. The Child and Family Agency is now the dedicated State agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children. It represents the most comprehensive reform of child protection, early intervention and family support services ever undertaken in Ireland. It brings together some 4,000 staff and an operational budget of approximately €600m. The Agency operates under the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 (*Tusla*, 2014).

The following quotation from Zetlin *et al.* (2006) illustrates this point.

> No one and everyone's in charge of the child; therefore, no one takes responsibility. The social workers don't understand it so they look at the educators; the educators don't know what happened to these kids so they look at the social workers. So it is nobody's problem, nobody's job is based upon whether these kids make it or not (County commissioner, quoted in Zetlin et al. 2006, p.170).

Indeed, Zetlin *et al.* (2006) reflect issues associated with accountability when dealing with foster children who have complex issues that affect their educational engagement and are surrounded by multiple stakeholders officially responsible for their care, including education, in this US study. On the one hand there has been considerable research from the perspectives of foster children, social workers and foster carers, but in Ireland, there is a lacuna of research on how stakeholders facilitate, engage and motivate foster children in their educational remit. This research study adds to the corpus but is unique in that it is firmly placed from the experiences of those primary stakeholders (teachers, school principals, and social workers).

1.2 Foster Care in an Irish Context

The Irish Foster Care Association (2013a, p.2) defines fostering as 'caring for someone else's child in your own home, providing family life for a child who for one reason or another cannot live with his own family, either on a short or long-term basis'. The Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations 1995 define a foster carer as 'a person other than a relative of a child who is taking care of a child on behalf of the health board' (Department Health, 1995a, p.1). 'Foster care is the most likely option when a child comes into the 'care system' either voluntarily or as a result of a Court Order. A crisis or breakdown in the child's family of origin therefore precedes it. (Horgan 2002, p.34). The State's responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of children whose parents fail in their duty falls to the Child and Family Agency (*Tusla)* by the Child Care Act 1991. The 1991 Act confers both a statutory power and duty upon the Child and Family Agency to protect children and promote their welfare. The *National Standards for Foster Care* oversee the quality of the foster care placements. The *HSE* (2012a) identifies seven different types of fostering used within the Irish child care system; short-term fostering; long-term fostering; emergency fostering; respite fostering; day fostering;

parent and child placements; and special fostering. Children can be placed in foster care either voluntarily (35% of those in care were voluntary agreements) or by court order 65%, where only 20% are contested (Coulter, 2018, p.1). Fostering a child differs from adoption because a foster child always remains a permanent part of his or her family of origin. *Tusla* is responsible for the child and the foster parents do not have guardianship.

According to *Tusla* (2018) on their information website, every child that enters care should have a care plan which is a written document that contains the important information about a child, such as their family's details, who they live with, where they go to school, access arrangements with family and how their health, well-being and education are to be promoted. The care plan is reviewed every 6 months for the child's first two years in a placement, with the first review after two months. After the initial two-year period has passed, the care plan is reviewed once a year. At the end of 2017, 92% of the 6,189 children in care had an up to date written care plan. (*Tusla,* 2018)

According to the *National Performance and Activity Dashboard. Tusla, 2018*, there were 6,182 children in the care of the State (level 4)[2] and 92% of these children were cared for in foster placements, either by relative foster parents (27%), or the majority by approved foster families with the remainder in residential care and other care placements including, detention centres, mother and baby units, and supported lodgings.[3] However there are more than 12,000 children that are on the care systems records, where an expression of concern has been made to *Tusla* for their wellbeing. Also, there are many other children where there are concerns held by family members and/or professionals but are not thought to be at 'immediate risk'. (level 3)[4]. According to *Focus Ireland* (2017) who provide services for homeless people, there are also 3826 children currently classified as 'homeless'[5] whereas several of them may be level 3. This is backed up by the *Ombudsman for Children's Office* who in their annual report in 2017 stated,

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[2] Level 4 labels children as high risk cases who need to be immediately removed from their habitat and placed in care either residential or foster care. (Barnados 2014)
[3] Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs Report on the provision of foster care services in Ireland 2017
[4] Level 3. Not at immediate risk but concerns provided by family or community members hence need to place support services for the family. Hardiker Service Model: Level Definitions (Source: McKittrick F, 2014,p.3)
[5] Section 2 of the Housing Act, 1988 states that a person should be considered to be homeless if:
(a) there is no accommodation available which, in the opinion of the authority, he, together with any other person who normally resides with him or who might reasonably be expected to reside with him, can reasonably occupy or remain in occupation of, or

> To our shame as a society we are tolerating a situation where almost 10,000 people are in emergency accommodation, including 3,500 children. (p.3)

Tusla recognizes that 'school attendance for children in care is greatly important in ensuring positive long-term educational outcomes. 'A high proportion of children in care in Ireland are pursuing their educational objectives'.(DCYA, 2018). At the end of December 2017, 98% of children in care aged 6 to 15 years and 94% of children in care aged 16 and 17 years were in full time education. 95% of children in care had an allocated social worker 94% of children in care had an up to date care plan[6]. At the end of December 2016, 1,880 young people aged 18 to 23 years and older were in receipt of an aftercare service. Of these, 74% were aged 18 to 20 years, with the remainder aged over 20. Of those opting for aftercare[7], 58% of 18-20-year old's and 57% of 18-22-year old's were in full-time education. 46% of care leavers remained living with their foster families, indicating the stability and permanence that foster care can offer.

Tusla asserts that placement stability is another indication of the quality of care services and in predicting successful long-term outcomes (DCYA 2018). Ireland has a high stability of placement for children in care and compares well with neighbouring countries. Only 2% of children in care are within their third, or more, placement within a year. This compares favourably with England (10%), Wales (9%) and Scotland (6%). However, they are not directly compatible (*Tusla* 2017, p.16). Even though the foster carers are the 'backbone' of this system, there were 874 approved foster carers awaiting a link (social) worker and 327 unapproved relative foster carers (who had a child placed with them for

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(b) he is living a hospital, county home, night shelter or other such institution, and is so living because he has no accommodation of the kind referred to in paragraph (a), and

(c) he cannot provide accommodation from his own resources.

[6]A care plan is a written document that contains the important information about a child, such as their family's details, who they live with, where they go to school, access arrangements with family and how their health, well-being and education are to be promoted. 3A care plan is an agreed written plan, drawn up by the child and family social worker, in accordance with the Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations 1995 (Part III, Article 11) or the Child Care (Placement of Children with Relatives) Regulations 1995 (Part III, Article 11), in consultation with the child, his or her family and all those involved with his or her care, for the current and future care of the child, that is designed to meet his or her needs. It establishes short, medium and long term goals for the child and identifies the services required to attain these (National Standards for Foster care, 2003, p.69).

[7]Young people who have had a care history with Tusla are entitled to an aftercare service based on their assessed needs. The core eligible age range for aftercare is from 18 years up to 21 years. This can be extended until the completion of a course of education in which a young person is engaged, up to the age of 23 years.(Tusla,2017)

longer than 12 weeks) awaiting approval. In March 2017 approximately 6% of children in general foster care and 8% of children in relative care did not have a dedicated social worker. This equates to over 400 children. At the end of 2016, 18% of general foster carers and 20% of relative foster carers did not have a link social worker. (*Tusla*, 2017)

As of June 2017, there were 1,466 social workers employed by *Tusla* (not including agency staff) and *Tusla* utilised the services of six private foster care companies. 'Private foster care organisations costs the State an average of €58,000 per child per year versus €17,900 for children fostered with foster carers registered directly with *Tusla*.' (EPIC quoted in JCCYA, 2017, p.16). At the end of December 2016, *Tusla* reported that there were 4,537 foster carers approved. Apart from these statistics, in their Annual Review on the Adequacy of Child Care and Family Support Services 2015, *Tusla* acknowledged that

> at present the Agency does not have the systems to collate the data and information required for a comprehensive assessment of the adequacy of Family Support Services and to determine how resources are meeting identified need. This is compounded by the number and types of services providing services to children and families. (p.12)

1.3 Rationale for the study

This research draws upon, and adds to, the existing body of research exploring foster care in an Irish post-primary education. However, there is still a lacuna in the research on the unique challenges and barriers that exist with foster children's educational journey identified through the lens of those teachers and social workers who operate at the sharp end of educational engagement and opportunity. The need for research on the educational experiences of foster children is particularly salient in the Irish context, due to the ever-increasing number of foster children in care.

The purpose of this study was to explore and better understand the world of the foster child. This research bridged the gap between two distinct motivations; a desire to know (basic research) and a motivation to improve (applied research).

1.3.1 The Research Question.

The research question was to investigate the experiences, and needs of foster children in their educational path, on the micro level through the lens of teachers and school principals and *Tusla* on the macro level to improve the educational opportunities of foster children.

This exploratory study mined the same terrain in Ireland as Darmody, McMahon, Banks, 2013; McMahon and Curtain 2013; Roarty *et al.* 2018; Moran *et al.* 2017; and Daly 2012, by concentrating on the educational opportunities for foster children in Ireland. This study is unique in that it specifically related to issues affecting foster children in the field of education from the perspective of those legally responsible for the educational remit of children in care. There is little direct research based on foster children's experiences in Ireland from an educational perspective. This research responded to the challenge set by Darmody, McMahon and Banks (2013) to explore the factors that influence school performance and the elements in the educational environment that affects school engagement for those in care. 'In relation to children in care, however, the issue of school performance – both academic attainment and broader more holistic school engagement – has received little attention' (Darmody, McMahon and Banks, 2013, p.36).The focus of this research was on the teachers, school principals, and social workers who are tasked with the educational remit of children in care. Were there similarities between the concepts of achievement as determined by the various educational stakeholders and what influence does that have on the educational engagement of foster children?

In summary therefore, this study added to the body of knowledge that constitutes a resource that can be harnessed to operationalise educational enhancements for the child in care. It also attempted to shed light on the potential benefits of student diversity and how the myriad of potential barriers to attainment can be alleviated through more efficient use of supports that are available through better interrelationships between the stakeholders.

The initial conception for this study was based on a keen personal interest in the field of foster child education. It is also underpinned by my personal experiences, both as a foster

parent and as a lecturer tasked with educating disparate groups of students with a variety of backgrounds, supports and needs.

1.4 Framing the study

Understandably, and evidenced in the research outlined above, there are multiple influences on a child's educational development. Roarty *et al.* (2018) looked at the outcomes for children in long-term care in Ireland and stated that,

> the research shows that it is not only the connection between the child and the foster family or parent that matters. Instead, the whole system surrounding the child must also be considered. The main factors that were found to influence permanence and stability were relationships, communication, support and continuity. (p.52)

There are multiple stakeholders that have a direct influence on a foster child's education (family of origin, foster family, teachers, peers, social workers) and interrelationships between these stakeholders. Then there are the institutions, processes and culture within these institutions (legislative and statutory bodies plus advocate agencies like IFCA, EPIC and Barnardos). Finally, informing the decisions within the institutions is another layer of the political, economic and social systems that underpin the structures and powers of the institutions. This research framed the various connections between that of the child in care and the various stakeholders and examined the relative influence in optimising their education opportunities. To do so effectively the multi-dimensional complexities that surround and affect a foster child's educational commitment and engagement must be acknowledged and the research must address this rigorously. Schon (1987) accurately reflects the perspective required in the researcher

> In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground, overlooking a swamp … In the swampy lowland, messy, confusing problems defy technical solution. The irony of this situation, is that the problems of the high ground tend to be relatively unimportant to individuals or society at large, however great their technical interest may be, while in the swamp lie the problems of greatest human concern. The practitioner must choose. Shall he remain on the high ground where he can solve relatively unimportant problems according to prevailing standards of rigor, or shall he descend to the swamp of important problems and non-rigorous inquiry? (p.3)

Given the pointed complexities outlined above, this research was firmly positioned in the 'the swampy lowlands, where situations are confusing messes incapable of technical solution and usually involve problems of greatest human concern' (Schön 1983, p.42).

1.4.1 Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory.

The conceptual framework that correlates with the complexities was identified as Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of human development. An ecological perspective understands education to be part of a 'broader socio-political tapestry' (Pirner, 2011, p.8). Therefore, educational researchers must 'look beyond single settings to the relationships between them' (Bronfenbrenner 1979, p.51). Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework is presented as providing a theoretical basis from which to examine the relationship between individuals and social systems (social workers, society, education, the education system and the foster child), and how they can best benefit one another to facilitate the foster child's educational journey. It revolves around a number of systems that influence and are influenced by the foster child's immediate environment. They are:

1. Microsystem: the individual's immediate environments (family, school, peer group, neighbourhood, and childcare environments)
2. Mesosystem: the *direct* connections between immediate environments
3. Exosystem: the environments that only *indirectly* affect the individual (such as parent's workplace)
4. Macrosystem: the wider cultural context
5. Chronosystem: the patterning of environmental events and transitions over the course of life

(Bronfenbrenner & Morris 2006; Bronfenbrenner 2005).

One advantage of using this framework was to highlight the inter-connectedness of the various systems that affect a foster child's educational trajectory. The model provides a framework for understanding and examining the educational attainment of foster children by emphasising the importance of understanding educational development in context as a joint function between the foster child, and the systems that surround the child (their interactions with the stakeholders that are responsible for their educational remit, and just as importantly, how those stakeholders relate to each other over time). Another advantage

of its use was to provide context to evaluate and illuminate their contributions, thereby adding a unique perspective to this complex debate on how to alleviate barriers to educational attainment for foster children.

Completing an education is affected by multiple factors. In addition to their family systems and their neighbourhoods/social support systems, maltreatment during adolescence and subsequent foster care placement introduces new factors that may complicate adolescent development. These factors may potentially influence subsequent educational development. Brofenbrenner's ecological framework provides a lens through which to understand the complexities of human development and the processes involved. Hence this model framed the experiences and perspectives of the direct stakeholders (teachers, school principals and social workers) who formed the core of the study, within the wider corpus of research.

1.5 Expected Outcomes of the study.

This study increased the body of knowledge concerning the education of foster care children in Ireland. More specifically it provided evidential support to governments and policy makers to facilitate efficient relationships between all the stakeholders responsible for a foster child's care. It helped the stakeholders themselves understand the complexity of dealing with other stakeholders.

The outcomes included:
1) Assessing comparisons with international experiences to identify trends, consistent with, and divergent from, the largely negative viewpoints offered by international experiences, particularly in North America and the United Kingdom.
2) Evaluating the challenges of dealing with multiple stakeholder ships when dealing with foster children.
3) Identifying which skills may be necessary to deal effectively with this vulnerable cohort
4) An identification of stress points where the system (the interrelatedness of the multiple stakeholder systems) lets the foster child down
5) Determining what resources are required to improve the effectiveness of teachers in managing foster children in Ireland presently

Utilising the Bronfenbrenner's conceptual framework it integrated the various strands of influence that affect the educational attainment of this vulnerable cohort and offered solutions to benefit the immediate stakeholders, namely teachers, foster parents, foster children on the micro level, and on a macro scale, *Tusla,* who are ultimately accountable for State care.

This research study investigated the experiences, and barriers to participation in Irish post-primary education, while also detailing the needs of foster children in their educational development through the lens of teachers, foster parents on the micro level and *Tusla* on the macro level.

Evidentially the reasons for children or young adults being placed in foster care are complex and rarely for any single, isolated reason. Also, there is enough evidence to suggest that it is a valid question to pursue whether the stakeholders are indeed acting in concert for the benefit of the foster child.

1.6 Chapter Overview

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the research question being asked. The genesis of the research question was explained, and the structure of the dissertation was outlined, together with a description of the theoretical framework that forms the basis of this study.

Chapter 2 focused on a comprehensive review of the foster care literature in education both from an international and a domestic perspective. This chapter described the vast corpus of knowledge surrounding the education of children in foster care that highlights the principal areas of concern in facilitating the educational remit of children in care. The literature review is cemented within the headings in Brofenbrenner's socio-ecological framework introduced in Chapter 1.

Chapter 3 analysed the methodology which declared the researcher's ontological and epistemological position. It defined the research paradigm, its theorethical framework in detail as the method used to elucidate the most appropriate way of investigating the experiences of stakeholders who are tasked with providing the educational remit to foster

children. The chapter also described the sampling strategy, limitations, the coding framework and the ethical issues confronted in the research.

Chapter 4 incorporated presentation and analysis of findings. The sample chosen for the research was 'a typical case-sample' (Cohen *et al.* 2004 p.143) and was not fully representative of the various stakeholders. However, the study did not seek to provide generalised findings across all educators. The interview schedule was developed based on a review of the literature and 16 other open-ended interviews that informed an interview schedule for a series of semi-structured interviews where participants were asked to describe their experiences with foster children and dealing with the various stakeholders. To further triangulate the results the research interviewed those that are responsible for the educational remit of the child at a practical level (teachers, School Principals and social workers) and those agents who are responsible for policy implementation (managers in *Tusla,* and the *Department of Children and Youth Affairs*).

The research contained qualitative data analysis of interviews coded utilising Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework and compared with the research findings evidenced in the literature review. The next step entwined these perspectives to present at the core a comprehensive review of the challenges that face the educationalists in fulfilling their remit when it comes to participants with multiple stakeholders and the proposed recommendations that will aid all parties concerned to focus on the continuing education of the foster child in a joined-up efficient manner.

Chapter 5 - Discussion and Conclusion included conclusions, recommendations and more prescient, the limitations of the study, and avenues of further research that would support and validate theories presented in this study. The report comprehensively identified of the challenges that exist in the management of foster children in a school setting and examined what improvements in resources or focus were necessary to aid the school in facilitating and enriching the foster child's experiences in school.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focusses on the foster care literature in education. In Chapter One the current national and international influences and changes in foster care in education in Ireland were outlined. These changes often take place at such a pace that governments and schools find it difficult to keep up with, and to fully instigate the required processes. Also, research tended to concentrate on the children in care or the social worker to explain foster children's low educational attainment, ignoring the educators' point of view. It has emerged that the Irish educational system must involve increasing numbers of disparate stakeholders that are officially tasked with ensuring the welfare of the foster child without specific signposts that would enable them to work together seamlessly to fulfil their responsibility in educating foster children. This requires more in-depth investigation in the literature.

Section 1 provides a conceptual model to frame the literature from the micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystem perspectives to highlight how previous research has influenced the development of the various ecologies (systems) and how they have developed in relation to either facilitating, or hindering, the education of the child in care. Hence the first section introduced the literature review in context and includes the reasoning behind using Bronfenbrenner's conceptual framework.

Section 2 concentrates on a scoping review of International research literature illuminating the complexity of various influences that affect a foster child's educational journey. This is followed by Irish research literature in Section 3, which examines the development of fostering in Ireland, explaining the unique circumstances that prevail and to what extent it is consistent with international norms, while also highlighting the differences that exist.

The next sections 4 – 8 contextualises the literature using Bronfenbrenner's conceptual framework, initially covering the personal traits and psychological effects that both predate care, and also experiences of 'being in care', which in turn will affect positive educational outcomes for the child in care. Section 5 in turn concentrates on the microsystem and the direct relationships between the foster child and their environments like school, parents, foster parents, peers and social workers and how they can be

influenced by the quality of these relationships. Section 6 examines the mesosystem (the set of interrelationships between stakeholders that have an indirect influence on a child in care's educational trajectory). Drilling to the core research question, this section explores the stress points and challenges identified in providing education programmes to foster children in Ireland in 2018.

Section 7 focuses on the outer circle of institutions and processes that are indirectly involved in the foster child's development, which is called the exosystem (Brofenbrenner 1979, p.25). This included all indirect influences that affect the relationships in the mesosystem, hence external influences like funding, resourcing issues, and supports are included here. The influences outlined can have a significant bearing on their engagement with education and thereby their educational outcomes.

Section 8 looks at the evolving Irish legislation literature that is motivated by Irish cultural and social influences. This is framed as part of Brofenbrenner's chronosystem (reminding the reader that this system of nested relationships is situated in time and shifts accordingly). It then details the ad hoc development of legislation that may have been a barrier in developing a coherent child care strategy and the remedies that have been applied, again focusing on the effect on the foster child's educational attainment.

Finally, Section 9 concludes with a summary of the findings that allows a holistic view of the various influences that support and challenge educators in teaching foster children in Ireland.

2.1.2 Framing the Literature review

'things should be as simple as possible…but no simpler' (Gandhi)

The purpose of this literature review is to reflect on theory/practice issues, to connect explicitly with relevant policy initiatives, and to explore the context and issues that inform and motivate the primary research question, which is to explore the challenges and barriers in teaching foster children in Ireland from the perspective of those stakeholders primarily responsible (teachers, school principals and social workers).

Bronfenbrenner's socioecological model is an attractive model in framing the literature since it represents the complex layers of school, family, peers, social workers and other advocates that surround the foster child. Placing the child at the center of influence, as Bronfenbrenner does, provides a compass for the literature review. It is expansive, yet focused. It is a 'conceptual tool for understanding social influences on development' (McIntosh *et al.* 2008, p.87) while taking account of the various contexts within which individuals learn. It acknowledges the systems and ecologies and the inter-relationships between the various stakeholders without ever losing sight of the ultimate goal; that of the foster child's educational attainment and development, which is the core research question in this study.

This framework permits analysis across a range of levels, i.e. the micro (student), meso (institutional actors and structures) and macro (wider social, political, historical, and cultural policy environment) (Brosnan 2013, p.66). This theory has been utilised in a number of studies to identify the multiple issues that affect a child's educational development (Moran, McGregor, and Devaney 2016 on permanence and stability for children in care; Onwuegbuzie *et al.* 2014 on the use of the framework in various methodologies; Leonard 2011 on school community partnerships; Harney 2008 on resilience; Campbell *et al.* 2001 on growth curves in educational development)

A later development on the micro, meso, exo, macro, chrono framework was Bronfenbrenner's process-person-context-time (PPCT) framework shown in Figure 1 that incorporates dimensions of proximal processes and personal characteristics (genetic predispositions towards resilience).
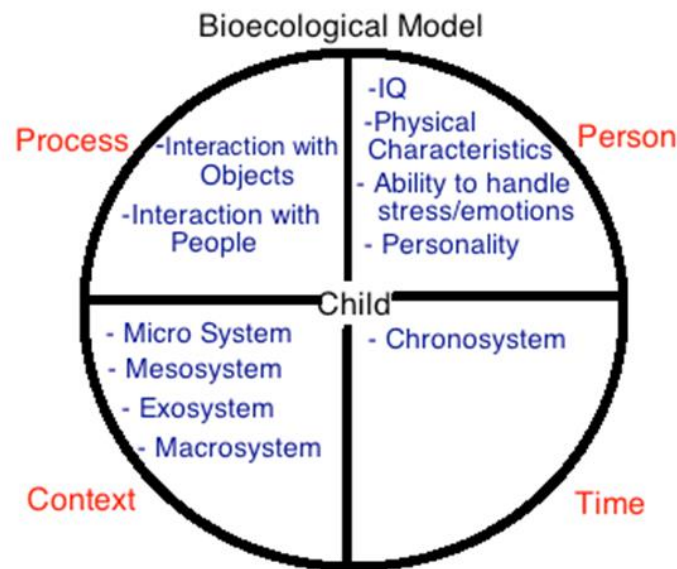
Figure 1: Brofenbrenner's PPCT (1979).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework has particular relevance for education and learning. While acknowledging the influence of each of the systems, it highlights the importance of the microsystem of school, the positive and nurturing relationships with teachers, as well as the influence of the mesosystem on educational outcomes. The ecological framework thus highlights the importance of school policies and practices being structured so that they cater to the needs of all students individually, especially those experiencing difficulties or barriers.

2.1.2.1 Criticisms the Socio- ecological framework..

The framework has evolved over time because of criticisms from Downes (2013), O'Kane (2007), and Christenson (2010). Bronfenbrenner (1995; 2004; 2005) altered some of his original work because of a concern that the original model tended to over-emphasise children's environments, often to the neglect of an equal emphasis on the developing child. Downes (2013) therefore argues that the ecological framework needs to acknowledge power relations and their impact on human development (Downes 2013, p.359). According to O'Kane (2007, p.52) 'it can overlook issues such as oppression and the misuse of power. This is because the theory does not explain why things happen or why connections exist'. Christensen (2010) proposed that resilience should be added to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model. This is because resilience can help explain how individuals overcome trauma in their lives, and how when brought up in adverse

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environments/circumstances they survive and become successful (Christensen 2010, p.105).

While acknowledging some of the limitations associated with this theory, the ecological perspective on human development does nonetheless provide an integrated system to help us understand the course and the factors involved in human development (Lerner 2005, p.xv.) In summary, it facilitates more comprehensive responses to problems affecting foster children such as otherness and exclusion and their impact on education and developmental outcomes.

2.1.3 The Irish Context.

The adoption of the socio-ecological approach echoes recent policy documents from Ireland which encompass life cycle and life course perspectives. (see DCYA. 2014) Moran *et al.* (2017) states that the chronosystem level indicates that the interactions between the systems and the experience and actuality of stability for young people continually change over time. Each permanence and stability mapping for a child should be conceptualised as one 'moment' which is subject to change and evolution. (Moran *et al.* 2017, p.13) Also, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs funded the first national strategy for children back in 2014 and that document stated that children and young people live and interact in multiple connected spheres (nested contexts such as families, peer groups, schools, clubs.) and that a continuum of investment is necessary across the life course for all children and young people, with additional support for 'vulnerable' groups'.

While the ecological model draws attention to the importance of fostering and developing positive and nurturing relationships in the microsystems of home and school, especially for children and families experiencing difficulties or poverty (Bronfenbrenner 1986, p.736), it also proposes that initiatives aimed at improving educational provision must look at supporting the mesosystem, i.e. outcomes are dynamic and transformative and emerge through the continuous interplay between factors that are located close to the child in their microsystem and mesosystem…and policy contexts that operate at exosystem and macrosystem levels which shape children and families' everyday lives. (Moran *et al.* 2017, p.20)

Consequently, supporting home, school and community links can contribute to more sustainable developmental outcomes for individuals and communities. While the developing child has little or no control over the exosystem, influences such as school curriculum and the organisational context the child operates in within the school environment has a direct bearing on them. Hence to provide care holistically for foster children, strategies and policies which are developed at the macrosystem level must be genuinely focused on supporting families and schools at the microsystem level, in their efforts to nurture and develop children's learning remit.

Therefore to create a more inclusive education experience for foster children, family friendly policies are needed to encourage participation, and the systems must be in place to allow participation from all relevant stakeholders. An ecological perspective to educational policy can help guide the development of interventions so that they better meet the needs of individual students while nurturing more equal educational outcomes. It also emphasises the importance of the microsystem as a central influence for the developing child, i.e. settings where the child has the most direct interactions, e.g. home or school. Therefore should relationships in these microsystems break down, difficulties can arise for the child in all the other settings (O'Kane 2007, p.123). On that basis, the ecological model is aptly employed to interpret and discuss the findings in the following chapters, and make appropriate recommendations based on these.

The core focus in this research are the three systems of meso, micro, and personal attributes of the foster child. Figure 2 illustrates the various ecologies that affect foster children.
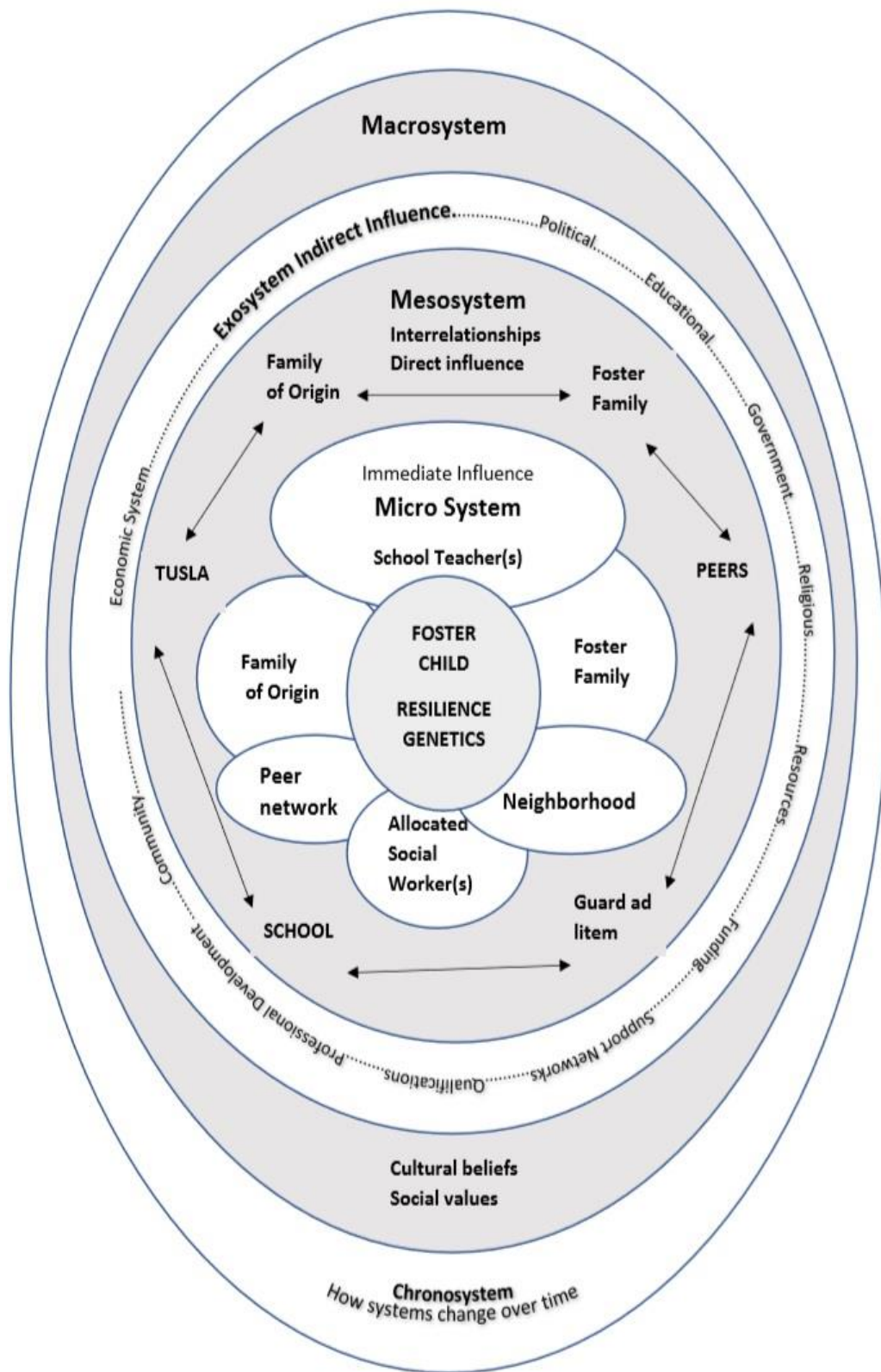
Figure 2: Brofenbrenner's Socio-ecological framework.

2.2.1 Foster Children Research Parallel Streams.

'What a wise and good parent would desire for his own children; that a nation must desire for all children'[8] (*Hadow Report of The Consultative Committee on The Primary School* (1931). Although the Hadow Report advocated the way in which care should be provided back in 1931 it was identified that as late as 1988, education was still not seen as a priority for foster children (Jackson 1988).

There appears to be concurrent parallel research. Social services conducted some research focusing on behaviour. Meanwhile, educationalists, late to the party, conducted independent research which has led to identifying the divide in roles that appear to be apparent between social services and education, with each seeing his or her role in a child's life as discrete and separate from each other (Meloy and Phillips 2012; Jackson and McParlin 2006; Jackson 2001). This supports the tentative thesis that the lack of engagement between stakeholders who nominally are on the same mission may have significant differences from a motivational, operational and structural standpoint. This influenced foster care research in Ireland, where it has tended to focus on wider social care issues, rather than on factors specific to children's access to, and participation in, education.

This has led to a lacuna in the corpus of literature on this subject (Höjer *et al.* 2008). Ultimately there is a need for greater examination of care systems and the remedial role that can be played by education (Höjer *et al.* 2008). This is supported by research in the United States by Cage (2018), who concluded that these studies often focus on understanding the views of children, carers and/or social workers, in relation to aspects of low educational attainment for children in care, not educators at the coalface.

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[8] The Hadow Report 1931 is one of the earliest UK policy documents to look at children in care quoted in page 2 of The Study Of Primary Education: A Source Book - Volume 1: Perspectives By Colin Conner, Brenda Lofthouse

2.2.2 International research on Foster care in education

Historically in Ireland, research studies have focused on telling the story of the experiences of young people who have been in State care, for example, the works of Raftery & O'Sullivan (1999). Latterly numerous recent Irish studies have attempted to bridge this gap (Daly and Gilligan 2005; McMahon and Curtin 2012; Darmody, McMahon and Banks, 2013; and Moran *et al.* 2017). Prior to this, research on the education of foster children mainly originated from the UK and the USA. The following authors (Jackson 2001; Calvin 2001; Stevens 2002; Emerson, and Lovitt, 2003; Pecora *et al.* 2006, 2009, 2012; Barnados 2006; Scherr 2007; Vacca 2008; and Gustavsson and MacEachron 2012) summarised the existing knowledge related to young people in foster care. Some of the reasons they state are more school placements than non-foster children, hence missing out on extra-curricular activities, and peer groups (O'Sullivan & Westerman 2007; Sebba *et al.* 2015; Stone 2007; Trout *et al.* 2008).

O'Higgins *et al.* (2015 ,p.6), in a review of international literature on the subject, state that those who have spent some time in care are more likely than their peers in the general population to be unemployed, to have mental health problems, to spend time in prison or psychiatric institutions, or to experience homelessness at some point in their lives (Centre for Social Justice 2015; Jackson & McParlin 2006).). According to a 2008 OFSTED study, children in care are about eight times more likely to be excluded from school (OFSTED 2008)[9]. Calvin (2001) quoted again in Emerson and Lovitt (2003, p.201) stated that 'according to some experts, it takes a child 4 to 6 month to recover academically from the disruption of changing schools'. Emerson and Lovitt (2003) go on to state that children in care miss out on a host of bonding relationships due to the instability of their care.

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[9] OFSTED stands for The Office for Standards in Education, which is the official body for inspecting schools in the UK.

2.2.2.1 Who is responsible for the attainment gap?

The next challenge was to perceive who is responsible for the attainment gap of foster children. Overall, children in care have an educational attainment gap, but there is no consensus as to whether it is due to pre-existing conditions of neglect and abuse that prompted entry into care, or due to shortcomings in the care system. On the one hand, a host of researchers (O'Higgins *et al.* 2015; Berridge 2007; Goddard 2000; Heath *et al.* 1989, Pecora 2012) indicated that the care system (and shortcomings) may not to blame. However, during the 1990s this view began to be challenged, with researchers placing the responsibility for academic under-achievement in foster children with the shortcomings in the educational institutions (Jackson and Martin 1998; Jackson and McParlin 2006; Connelly and Chakrabarti 2008).

Research in the UK has generally found that entry into care is beneficial to children's education, and that the care system itself is not solely responsible for poor education outcomes. Instead, the combination of pre-care poverty, poor social backgrounds, trauma and maltreatment, alongside the instability of placement moves while in care, negatively affects children in care's educational chances (Fostering Network 2006; Berridge 2012b; Welbourne & Leeson 2012). Thus, UK research recommendations have begun to focus on specialist services to help deal with early damage in children in care, and better trained social workers and carers.

This chimes with *Tulsa's* assertion that the care system is fit for purpose due with the majority of the 6,300 clients successfully managing their care plan in all relevant areas, utilising the concept of placement stability (2% on third or more placement in one year) and school attendance (98% for 6-15 years, and 94% for 16-17 years) as the prime indicator of the quality of care services and in predicting successful long-term outcomes (*Tusla,* 2018). This compares well with the US where '40% of children are on their third placement'. (Pecora 2012, p.1).Ultimately, researchers have logically argued for further research. (Gustavvson and MacEachron 2012; Darmody *et al.* 2013).

2.2.2.2 The multiplicity of issues that affect educational achievement

Gustavvson and MacEachron (2012, p.83) state that educational problems do not occur in isolation and they are almost always accompanied with other challenges like poverty, maltreatment, neglect, attachment disorder, etc. Foster children are more likely to have behavioural, and mental health problems, and poor grades, and a large part of this is down to school mobility. With the multitude of reasons that children enter care, a lot of responsibility is given to the school in relation to educational attainment for those in care (Loftus 2017; Jackson and McParlin 2006). This is obviously a contentious issue, since it places a burden on the school to cater for the consequences of neglect, and the trauma that pre-dates care (Berridge *et al.* 2008; Fostering Network 2006; Berridge 2012b; Welbourne & Leeson 2012). Research is needed (Darmody, McMahon, Banks 2013; Daly and Gilligan 2010) However, the importance is underpinned by the fact that high school completion is 'one of the most promising mechanisms for mitigating the effects of maltreatment and subsequent foster care placement (Cage 2018). Similar to the United Kingdom, Ireland's policy to address educational disadvantage has centred on additional resources and supports for schools serving disadvantaged children. In Ireland, Darmody *et al.* (2013) argued that 'while literature and statistical data indicate that socioeconomic factors such as poverty and social exclusion may be 'causal indicators' of children being placed in care, these issues are under-researched'(p37). Also under-researched are 'the pathways by which children in the care system might overcome their childhood disadvantages through further and higher education'(Eurydice 2005; Jackson and Ajayi 2007). It is clearly a contentious issue with evidence to support both views and again exemplifies the difficulty in providing the right resources to overcome barriers in education for this vulnerable group.

2.2.2.3 Recommendations from International Literature.

International literature suggests that school systems and social service agencies need to improve their collaboration to support better the teachers of foster children and, thus, the outcomes for children living in foster care. (Zetlin *et al.* 2004, 2006; Allen and Vacca 2010; Bruce *et al.* 2010; Pecora 2012). American studies reiterate the critical role of education in engendering self-sufficiency and coping skills into adulthood (Stein 2006a; Bruce *et al.* 2010). They focus on training for carers; improved information sharing; better

identification and treatment of mental health problems that impact on educational outcomes; and advocacy and preparation for continuing with education in college or university.

Cuban (1992), in his article on curriculum stability and change remarked that the *loci* of the impetus for any educational change are often to be found in the current malaise of society. His pithy comment 'when society has an itch, the schools scratch'(1992, p.216) underscores the acute vulnerability of educational change to social change. There are several implications from international research on the education of foster children that are also of relevance in an Irish context for foster parents, teachers and social workers tasked with their educational remit.

2.3 Irish Literature on Foster Children.

In the case of Ireland, Daly and Gilligan (2005) undertook one of the earliest examinations of the educational issues facing long-term foster children. This was followed by a longitudinal study of the biennial State of the Nation's Children Report, first published in 2006 (a combined approach by ESRI and Trinity College Dublin, and published by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs), the National Children in Care Inspection Report (2009), McMahon and Curtin (2012) on social networks of foster children, Darmody *et al.* (2013) on the education of children in care, Moran *et al.* (2017) on facilitating stability in long-term care; and Daly (2012) who conducted research on outcomes for young people leaving care. For a review of the history of fostering in Ireland please see Appendix G.

More recently there has also been research in the form of bulletins and adequacy reports from *Tusla* since its inception in 2014, DES *Participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme 2016*, government-sponsored studies by the DCYA, examining complex child protection cases (Coulter 2018), and the Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Children and Youth Affairs (JCCYA) *Report on the provision of foster care services in Ireland 2017*. Finally there are annual reports by child care advocates Barnados and Empowering People In Care (EPIC), and studies by vested

interests like the Irish Foster Care Association (IFCA) and private foster companies in Ireland[10].

The publication of recent government sponsored reports is concurrent with the raft of recent child centred legislation. For example, The Children First Act 2015, The Child Care (Amendment) Act, The Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012, and the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012, are key pieces of complementary legislation designed to improve child safety, protection and the educational experiences of foster care children. The Children First Act 2015 provides for several key child protection measures that are relevant to schools and registered teachers including statutory obligations to keep children safe, and to report concerns.

> The Child Care (Amendment) Act 2015 strengthens the legislative provisions regarding aftercare, imposing a statutory duty on *Tusla* to prepare an aftercare plan for an eligible child or eligible young person. (Department of Children and Youth affairs 2018)

The Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 provides in connection with the protection of children and certain vulnerable adults, for offences of withholding information relating to the commission of certain arrestable offences (including certain sexual offences) against children (Department of Justice and Equality 2018). The National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 provides a statutory basis for the vetting of persons carrying out relevant work with children or vulnerable persons (Department of Justice and Equality 2018).

However, successive studies by *Tusla* (2012) and the Ombudsman for Children's Office (2013) have iterated that 'no comprehensive composite picture is available to show the extent to which the standards of education as set out in the National Standards for Foster Care are being met in practice'. A mechanism needs to be established for systematic gathering of data on the educational experiences of children in care to inform evidence-based policy making (Darmody, McMahon and Banks, 2013, p.33)

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[10] The six private foster care companies used by *Tusla* are: Care Visions Ireland, Daffodil Care, Five Rivers Ireland, Fostering First Ireland, Oak Lodge Foster Care Services, Orchard Children Services.

It should be noted that by international standards, the number of children placed in foster care in Ireland is very high. According to figures produced by the US Department of Health and Human Services in June 2011, 74% of children in care in the US were placed in foster care, while statistics published by the UK's Department of Education in 2010 indicate that 73% of children in English State care were placed in foster care. Out of the children placed in the care of the State, some 5,548 are placed with foster carers with 92% of children in State care placed with foster carers; it is not an overestimation to assert that foster care is the backbone of the Irish care system.

Whereas in the past there was scant evidence of any concerted focus on the effects on Irish children in care, it is apparent that this is somewhat remedied by recent developments in child care policies and legislations and research interest outlined earlier.

Nonetheless, Kiersey (2012) who reviewed literature on the educational outcomes internationally was of the opinion that 'the bulk of research undertaken in the UK has mainly been small-scale qualitative studies' (p.4), whereas the US have had experience with larger studies. Ireland is similar to the UK, with smaller scale studies being the norm (Roarty *et al.* 2018; McMahon, Conor & Curtin, 2013; Darmody, McMahon, Banks 2013; Daly and Gilligan 2005), with the exception of the *State of the Nations Children Report* (2006). Another exception in the United Kingdom was a three-stage investigation, sometimes referred to as the York studies (Sinclair *et al.* 2004a, Sinclair *et al.* 2004b, and Sinclair 2005) which were among the most comprehensive undertaken. They found broad approval of foster care by comparison with other forms of care (except adoption, where approval ratings were a little better) and permanence in placements appeared to be favoured. 'Once again, motivation and happiness at school were important and those who 'wanted' to be in the placements'. (Denenberg, 2016. p.30).

These studies often focus on understanding the views of children, carers and/or social workers in relation to aspects of low educational attainment for children in care, not educators at the coalface.

2.4 Care Systems in the Irish Context

2.4.1 The Child and Family Agency (Tusla).

The Child and Family Agency (*Tusla*) was established in January 2014 to implement these aims and takes over all the functions of the former child welfare services of the Health Service Executive (HSE) (*Tusla,* 2014). It marks the establishment of a single, dedicated agency undertaking sole responsibility for services delivered for the welfare and protection of children and families.

The work of *Tusla* reflects national and international policies and legal frameworks in the domains of child welfare and children's rights that emphasise the significance of the family and the duty to uphold children's rights as expressed in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC). The overall ethos of child welfare intervention under *Tusla* is one of prevention and early intervention, where efforts are made to ensure the removal of a child from their own secure and permanent home environment.

Tusla as a statutory body ultimately responsible for childcare in Ireland has been dogged by controversy since its inception in 2014, noted by many negative media reports.[11][12][13][14][15] However, the scale of the task in protecting the vulnerable child who has entered care is complex and is outlined next along with a thorough examination of the responses by *Tusla* to adapt, learn, and develop educational and other supports to ensure safe passage and optimise opportunities for children in care.

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[11]http://www.breakingnews.ie/ireland/time-for-accountability-in-hse-says-head-of-irish-foster-care-association-718766.html.
[12]http://www.breakingnews.ie/ireland/garda-investigation-ordered-into-allegations-around-foster-care-abuse-case-718467.html
[13]http://www.breakingnews.ie/ireland/hse-mishandled-apology-to-foster-home-abuse-victim-obrien-admits-718642.html
[14]http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/sex-abuse-cases-forty-six-children-placed-in-foster-care-with-abusive-family-377109.html
[15]http://www.thejournal.ie/worrying-hiqa-report-raises-questions-about-safety-of-foster-children-in-dublin-north-west-804706-Feb2013/

2.4.2. Levels of Intervention

As children's needs vary in complexity and intensity, so too must the formal support services provided to meet their needs, when necessary (Devaney 2011, p.77). *Tusla* has adopted a framework with four levels to evaluate need according to the levels of intervention required. as outlined in Figure 3.

Hardiker service model: level definitions

Level 4 services: for children at high risk

Level 3 services: for families and children with complex or multiple needs

Level 2 services: for targeted areas of disadvantage or to meet specific needs

Level 1 services: universal, for all families
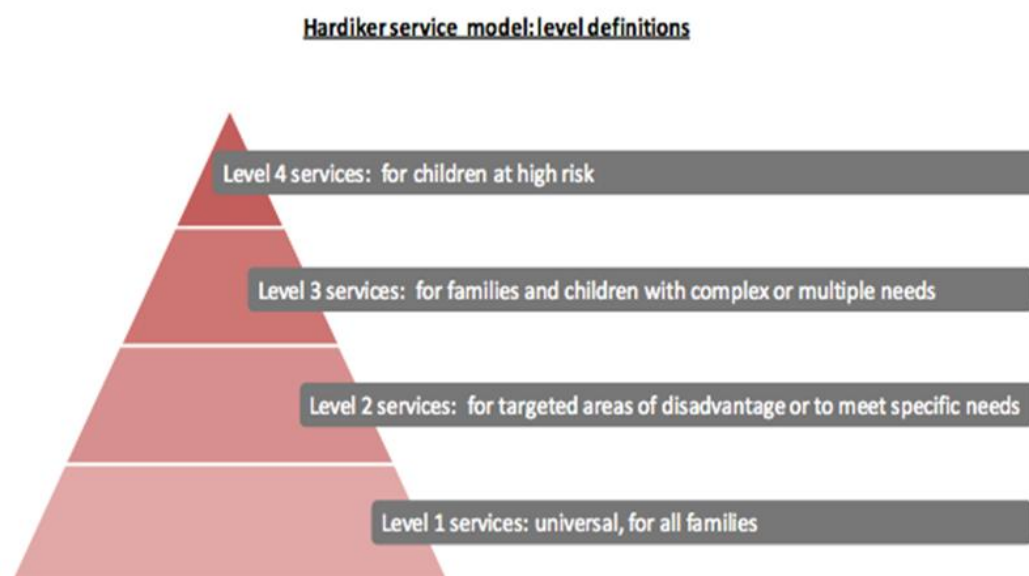
Figure 3: Hardiker Service Model: Level Definitions

(Source: McKittrick F. 2014, p.3)

This way of classifying and aggregating need helps policymakers, service managers and practitioners to organise and orientate interventions. *Tusla* (2015, p.33). Devaney (2011, pp 74-77) provides the backstory noting that in 1986, Hardiker, Exton and Barker were commissioned by the Department of Health and Social Security in the UK to explore interventions to prevent family breakdown or the need to take children into care.

> The name 'Hardiker' is now synonymous with levels of children's need. In an Irish policy and practice context, this framework is typically presented as a triangle, with the specialised services represented at the narrowest point, and the more widely available universal services represented at the wider bottom part of the triangle. (Devaney (2011, p.77)

DCYA (2010) outlined in detail the differing levels. At Level 1 there are universal services provided with a promotional role which are available to all children and families,

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health care, education, leisure, community development initiatives such as parent and toddler groups, particularly in disadvantaged communities. As a child or young person presents with an identified level of need, the services available at Level 2 are targeted to vulnerable families, groups and communities. They are characterized by referral and full parental support. They are focused on parenting support, additional educational support to children who are deemed vulnerable depending on the assessment. Level 3 represents support for families, children or young people where there are serious or chronic problems. Support operates through a complex mix of services that have to join up and work together well to be effective. State interventions are involved here, in particular with children who have been place on the Child Protection register and those that have come before the courts. Level 4 represents support for the families and children where the family unit has broken down temporarily or permanently. *Tusla* assumes responsibly for the guardianship. This way of classifying and aggregating need helps policymakers, service managers and practitioners to organise and orientate interventions. (*Tusla* 2015, p.33)

2.4.3. The Referral Process

Tusla's Child Protection and Welfare Service (CP&W) is aimed at children with the highest level of need (i.e., those at the higher end of Hardiker Level 3 and those at Hardiker Level 4) In practice, social workers carry the lead responsibility for responding to these cases. (*Tusla* 2015, p33) They go on to state that for a report to be eligible for CP&W Services, i.e., to be considered a referral, the subject of the report must be a child and the essence or character of the report is a concern (for the subject) that can be categorised as one of the following primary report types: Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Emotional Abuse, Neglect or a Welfare concern.

If a child's need for protection cannot be met by their parents or guardians, emergency action may be taken; for example, placement with relatives or other forms of foster or residential care. This takes place in only a small percentage of cases coming to the attention of *Tusla*. Where it does happen, it is frequently agreed on a voluntary basis with a child's parents or guardians. If no agreement is reached, an application is made to the court under Part IV of the Child Care Act 1991, where a judge makes a determination about the child's need for protection and may make a care order. According to Barnados

(2016. p.4), 'there are many other children where there are concerns held by family members and/or professionals but have not yet been communicated to the HSE – level 3'. Figure 4 provides the March 2018 statistics on the breakdown in placement and number of children in care

Number of Children in Care

Mar 2018
Foster care (general): 4,036 (66%)
Foster care (relative): 1,629 (26%)
Residential: 361 (6%)
Other: 125 (2%)
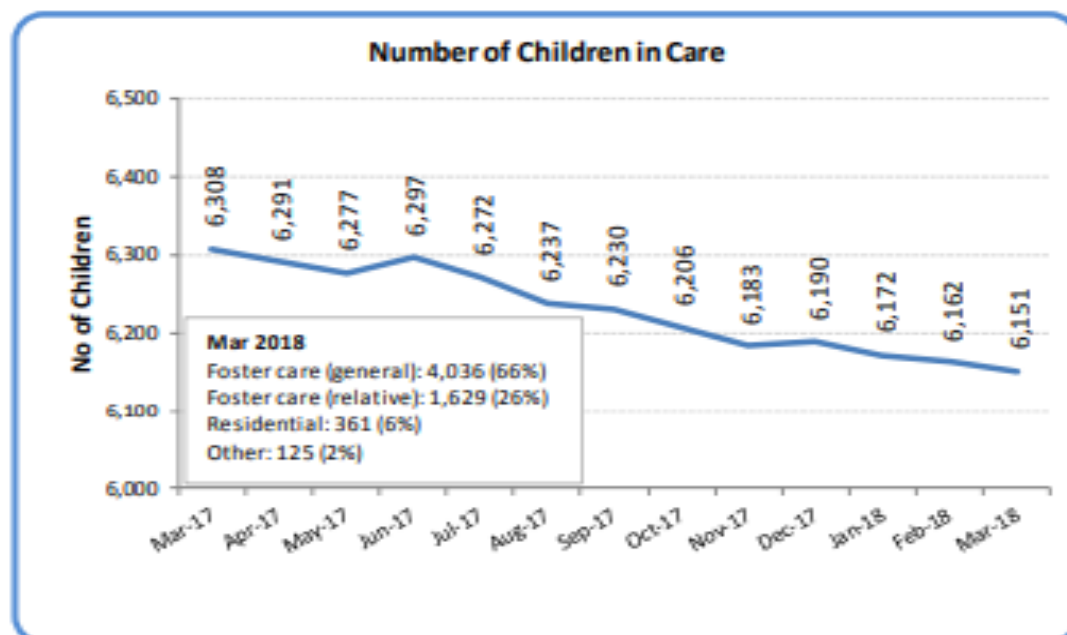
Figure 4: Number of Children in Care 2018.

Source :National Performance and Activity Dashboard, March 2018 (Tusla 2018)

In Ireland today, there are 6,151 children in care (*Tusla*, 2018) – level 4.[16] However, there are more than 12,000 children that are on the care systems records, where an expression of concern has been made to the HSE for their general wellbeing. Also, there are many other children where there are concerns held by family members and professionals but have not yet been communicated to the HSE – level 3[17]. In 2015, there were 1,550 children entering care whereas 1,420 clients exited the child services system. Hence there is growth in the need for services, albeit at a small pace..(*Tusla*, 2015) However, service

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[16] Level 4 labels children as high risk cases who need to be immediately removed from their habitat and placed in care either residential or foster care.

[17] Level 3. Not at immediate risk but concerns provided by family or community members hence need to place support services for the family.

gaps exist, since as of March 2018, there were 4589 children at risk and awaiting social worker intervention with 734 of those are high priority cases (Figure 5)

Cases Allocated / Awaiting Allocation to Social Worker

Number of cases (y-axis): 0, 3,000, 6,000, 9,000, 12,000, 15,000, 18,000, 21,000

No Allocated: 19,226 · 19,597 · 19,756 · 19,973 · 20,668 · 20,239 · 20,635 · 20,294 · 19,685 · 19,999 · 20,059 · 19,610 · 19,890

No Awaiting Allocation: 6,158 · 5,948 · 5,816 · 5,893 · 5,524 · 5,536 · 5,284 · 5,212 · 4,760 · 4,892 · 4,526 · 4,756 · 4,689

Months: Mar-17, Apr-17, May-17, Jun-17, Jul-17, Aug-17, Sep-17, Oct-17, Nov-17, Dec-17, Jan-18, Feb-18, Mar-18

Legend: No Allocated — No Awaiting Allocation

Cases Awaiting Allocation, by Priority Level

No of Cases (y-axis): 0, 500, 1,000, 1,500, 2,000, 2,500, 3,000, 3,500, 4,000, 4,500

Medium: 3,582 · 3,607 · 3,766 · 3,720 · 3,609 · 3,441 · 3,309 · 3,347 · 3,022 · 2,925 · 2,739 · 2,967 · 2,971

Low: 1,514 · 1,438 · 1,167 · 1,182 · 1,099 · 1,076 · 1,009 · 1,113 · 1,000 · 1,149 · 914 · 891 · 984

High: 1,062 · 903 · 883 · 991 · 816 · 1,019 · 966 · 752 · 738 · 818 · 873 · 898 · 734

Months: Mar-17, May-17, Jul-17, Sep-17, Nov-17, Jan-18, Mar-18

Legend: Low — Medium — High

Cases of Retrospective Abuse Allocated / Waiting Allocation

These cases are not included in cases presented in charts 1-5

	Mar-17	Apr-17	May-17	Jun-17	Jul-17	Aug-17	Sep-17	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18
Allocated	1,141	1,264	1,292	1,326	1,370	1,397	1,377	1,443	1,473	1,259	1,465	1,460	1,384
Awaiting Allocation	754	661	590	572	579	561	501	479	436	394	483	543	618
Open Cases	1895	1925	1882	1898	1949	1958	1878	1922	1909	1653	1948	2003	2002
Referrals	139	83	141	90	99	118	103	105	125	128	184	193	151

Figure 5: Cases awaiting allocation to Child Protection and Welfare Services 2018.

Source: *Tusla* National Performance and Activity Dashboard March 2018.

In summary, the latest figures from *Tusla* (2018) indicate the scale of child protection and welfare issues in Ireland and the response by *Tusla* in managing their responsibilities. According to the 2018 Business report by *Tusla*, '*Tusla*'s child protection and welfare services received 47,399 referrals in 2016 (parents, relatives, Gardai, Courts system , teachers, social workers and/or other interested parties.; some 3,803 (9%) more than 2015 and the highest number for all years 2012–2016' (p.17) , as shown in Figure 6. However, not all referrals required social work intervention. In 2016, just over one in four referrals required a social work assessment. There were 19,890 cases allocated to social workers with 4,689 pending allocation. Of these there are 734 high priority cases, 2,971 medium priority cases and 984 low priority cases awaiting allocation. There was also a rise to 618 retrospective abuse cases awaiting allocation.
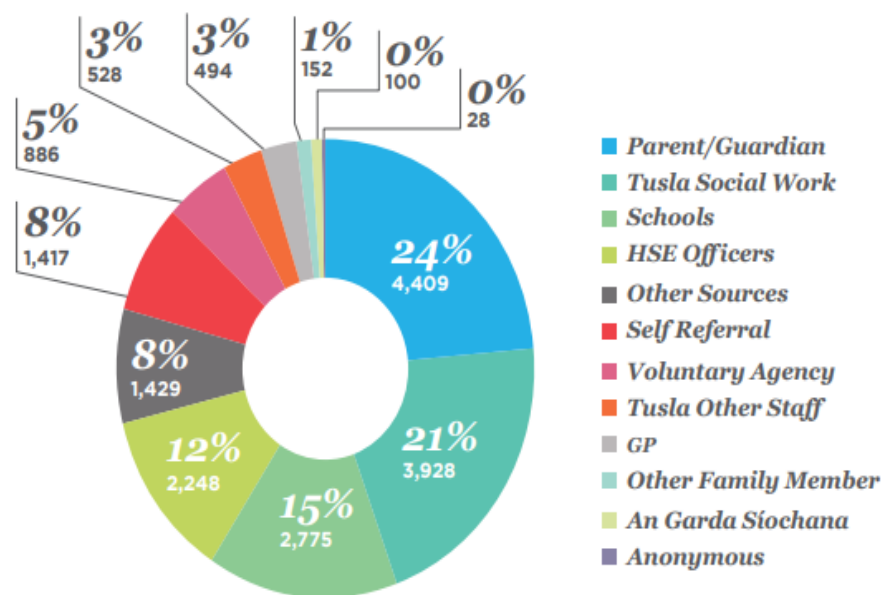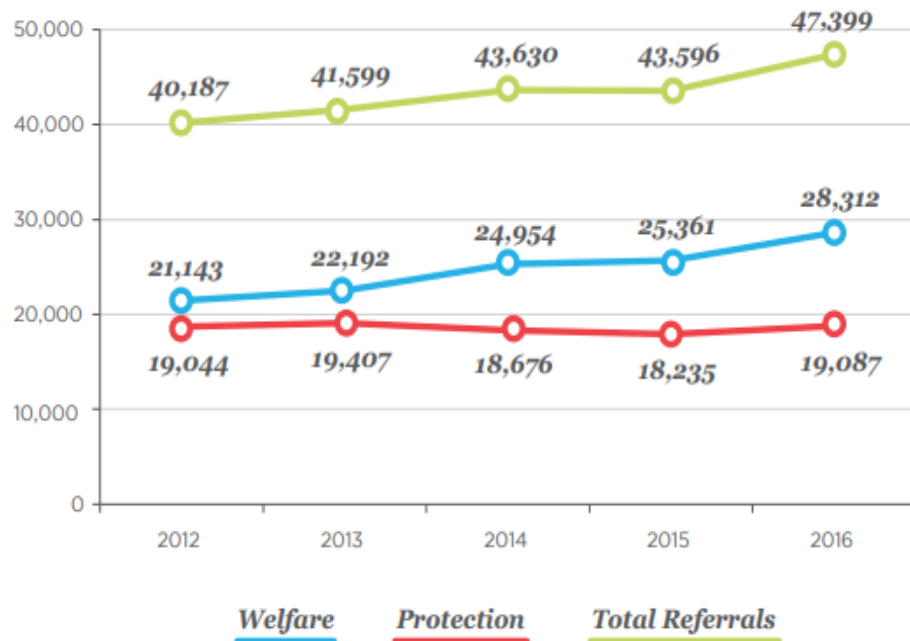
Figure 6:Number and Sources of referrals to Child Protection Welfare Services, 2012–2016.

Source: *Tusla* Business Report 2018.

Brofenbrenner's Socio-Ecological Framework applied.

In general, and as expressed in the literature review thus far, three critical experiences affect the educational opportunities for a large majority of foster children; the service gaps provided for the foster child, the educational attainment gaps that children in care experience, and the reasons for entry into care in the first place. This is explained by widening the analysis utilising Brofenbrenner's conceptual framework which shall be operationalised for the remainder of the literature research.

The ecological model presented by Bronfenbrenner (1979) is understood through means of separate 'nesting' and interconnected structures, classified as the micro, meso, exo, macro and chrono systems (Bronfenbrenner 2005, p.45) representing the complex layers of school, family, peers, social workers and other advocates that surround the foster child as systems that interact at different levels. The importance of having positive relationships between these settings is considered essential for the developing person. (Bronfenbrenner 1994, p.645) and enables 'school personnel to perform their jobs more

efficiently'.(Williams and Sanchez 2013, p.635). Higgins *et al.* (2008) note that this relationship can also help teachers to adapt their pedagogical approaches so that the needs of students are better met (p.53)

2.5. The Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) Framework and the Foster Child.

At the innermost core are the personal attributes that can affect a foster child's disposition towards their own learning remit. This section focusses on direct influences on how the foster child interacts in their immediate environment and reveals personal characteristics that can have a positive influence on a child's educational trajectory.

2.5.1 Theories of socialisation and developmentalism

Wyness (2006, p.122) labels developmentalism as the 'ages and stages' model of childhood and has been the dominant theory and practice in studying and researching children and childhood. It has also become the dominant approach through which children's pathways from childhood to adulthood are assessed. Children's development is measured or marked along a pathway of chronological pre-determined milestones which become hierarchal until they reach adulthood.

Piaget (1932) is the figure most closely related to the child development approaches. Piaget's model follows the child's development from birth to mid-adolescence, focusing on the premise that, although children have to adapt and interpret their environments, the social sphere of children's lives is relatively steady and secure. Using Piaget's ages and stages theory, parents and professionals search for signs in children to indicate that they are developing in accordance with the relevant age stage. (Figure 7)

Adult	
Ages	Stages
12-14 years 7-12 years 2-7 years 0-2 years	Formal Operative Concrete Operations Pre-operational (problems of egocentrism and conservation) Sensory-motor
Child	**Stages of Development**

Figure 7: Piaget's Model of Cognitive Development

Source: Piaget (1932)

Socialisation suggests a dependency-based relationship between parents and children and believes that parents, as influential adult figures, take responsibility for instilling the social order onto their children. Children, therefore, are relatively powerless, relying on the actions of the adults closest to them in their world.

Durkeim (1982) did not view the family as the primary socialising agent, believing parents to be too particular to provide children with a more comprehensive, more universal moral framework. He believed the teacher was the key professional authority figure through which to socialise children and integrate them into socially ordered society. This again highlights the value of this research topic in looking at the educational trajectory through the lens of the 'adult' stakeholders.

2.5.2 Three Agencies of Socialisation.

Elkin (1960) identifies the three key agencies of socialisation as the family, the school and the peer group. While Durkheim viewed the educator as the most important socialising agent in a child's life, Elkin, reflecting the thinking of most structural functionalists, identified the parent as the most influential socialiser. Parents are the first contact children have with the social structure and are also the key negotiator between

children and their wider community. Hence we can see the damage inflicted upon children in care since they are not receiving positive socialisation re-enforcement by their parents of origin. This highlights the chronological imperative to frame support at an early stage as possible.

The second agent is the school. Structural functionalists believe the school to be a key socialising factor for children and for socialisation to be effective, the family and school must work in partnership to assist the child in becoming a fully integrated adult member of society. Although working in partnership, the school plays a different role to parents in the socialisation project. The school firstly offers a formal structure of rules and also introduces adult figures, who relate to children more formally and professionally. It also provides a stable constant environment when everything else may be in traumatic transition. Finally, the learning is much more evident in the school with knowledge being transmitted via curricula, timetables and exams.

Finally, the peer group acts as the third influence. The informal nature of peer friendships allows for the exploration of a wider range of subjects and also provides an experience of less authoritarian figures in their lives. Friendship also provides an avenue through which children can explore independence, as they have usually been dependent on adult authority figures. The peer network should not be underestimated since children in care can become 'normalised' and not seen as different (this reflects the literature that evidentially expresses their desire not to be considered 'other' or different). Indeed, the fact that 'everyone has a story' allows foster children to be socially included. In Moran *et al.* (2017), young people commented that they developed better relationships with social workers whom they saw as 'normal'. When defining normality in this case, they said it was about 'having no agendas' and having someone to do 'normal' activities with. Essentially, many young people wanted their social worker to 'look beyond' the labels of being 'in care' and as 'looked after' by the State. This is comparable to the international literature around matching, which shows that when the needs of the child and the expectations of foster carers and children are met, placements endure for longer (Stott and Gustavsson 2010).

2.5.3 Criticisms of attachment theory

Developmental theories, such as attachment theory, have been critiqued for failing to recognise diversity in different family structures (Penn 2005). Hollway (2006) critiques the over-reliance on maternal relationships in understanding child development and maintains that this is to the detriment of recognising the importance of other elements of a child's life, such as sibling relations, peer groups and genetic factors. Harris (1998) suggests that parents cannot be entirely responsible for the development of children due to the influence of other factors, such as nature and community.

Mayall (2002) identifies children as active members of society whose childhood experiences are influenced by class, generation, gender and ethnicity. Hojer (2007, p.74), however, identifies a changing perception of children's roles in modern society. This new perception of childhood looks upon children as active subjects and competent social agents, not just as passive receivers of care and attention. Therefore, the focus has been set on the agency of children and young people, and their involvement in social interactions, both within a familial context and in society as a whole. Hence that raft of Irish legislation aiming at providing the child have an active voice in their own lives. (*UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989*; *Children's Act 1991*, and amendments)

Another important characteristic that may pre-date and is part of a foster child's personal identity is how the experience of neglect predisposes the foster child to develop cognitively at a slower rate than non-foster children

2.5.4 The Influence of Neglect

Following on from Kerig and Wenar in 2006, research has demonstrated a profound effect that neglect has upon the child's developmental capacity motivating Bryan Samuels (2011), Commissioner of the Administration on Children, Youth and Families, U.S. House of Representatives to state that

> The research is clear that the experience of abuse and neglect leaves a particular traumatic fingerprint on the development of children that cannot be ignored if the child welfare system is to meaningfully

improve the life trajectories of maltreated children, not merely keep them safe from harm.

Also, in case the reader is still in doubt

> No other groups of children and young people in the developed world are more socially or developmentally disadvantaged than children and young people who reside in court-ordered alternate care, and those who are subsequently adopted from care… These populations exert exceptional demands on poorly matched, generic mental health services… Tarren-Sweeney and Vetere (2013, p.3)

Ireland's *Children First Act 2015* defines neglect in terms of an *omission*, where the child suffers significant harm or impairment of development by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety, attachment to and affection from adults, and/or medical care. The *threshold of significant harm* is reached when the child's needs are neglected to the extent that his or her well-being and/or development are severely affected. (*The Children First Act 2015*). Hence considering most children in care are due to a court order, with neglect as the main reason it is imperative to understand how a child in care is disadvantaged from the start. Also, Welbourne et al (2012, p.133) states that

> exposure to trauma is linked to lower educational attainment. The risk of lower attainment is highest for children with low levels of attainment pre-trauma: being successful is a protective factor. Low attainment is a risk factor for post-trauma difficulties of different kinds, not just educational attainment. The more traumatic events experienced and the more varied the types of trauma, the more probable it is that a child will display post-traumatic symptoms (p.133)

Studies in the United Kingdom and United States focus on the prevalence of neglect that affects children in care (Figure 8) and the different consequences of neglect which is dependent upon the age of the child (Table 1) below.

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Neglect Is the Most Prevalent Form of Child Maltreatment
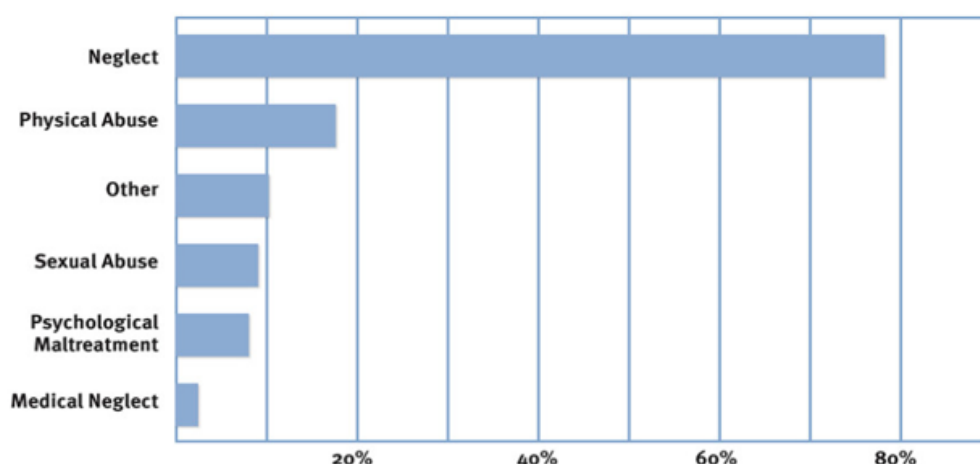
Figure 8: Neglect is the most prevalent form of child maltreatment.

Source: US Department of Health and Services 2010

The Consequences of Neglect

0-5 years

- Failure to thrive; stunting, poor height and weight gain
- Developmental delay; not meeting milestones e.g. not sitting, crawling
- Language delay
- Emotional, social and behavioural difficulties e.g. frequent tantrums; persistent attention seeking or demanding; impulsivity or watchful and withdrawn

5-11 years

- Poor concentration and achievement at school
- Speech and language delay
- Aggressive/withdrawn
- Emotional, social and behavioural difficulties as above
- Isolated or struggles to make and keep friendships
- Is bullied or bullies others

11-18 years

- Failure to learn
- Poor motivation
- Socially isolated/poor peer relationships
- Increasingly high risk anti-social behaviour
- Potential for self-harm/substance use
- Feelings of low self-worth and alienation
- Poor self-esteem and confidence

Table 1:Neglect Matters. What you need to know about neglect.

Source:NSPCC North-East Lincolnshire Local Safeguarding Children Board 2013

Scientific research has focused on how neglect can damage brain development. Perry (2002) illustrated the negative impact of neglect on the developing brain comparing CT scans on a series of three-year-old children that had suffered severe sensory deprivation neglect in early childhood against healthy children in supportive relationships. He found that the child's brain who suffered neglect was significantly smaller than average and had abnormal development which demonstrated the change in a brain's functioning capacity brought on by neglect. Egeland (1983) also considered the psychological harm that neglect can inflict on a child as evidenced in Figure 9 where it was shown that children suffering neglect lacked the creativity, confidence, and assertiveness to cope with challenges in comparison to children that did not suffer maltreatment.

Neglect Can Be a Greater Threat to Development than Abuse
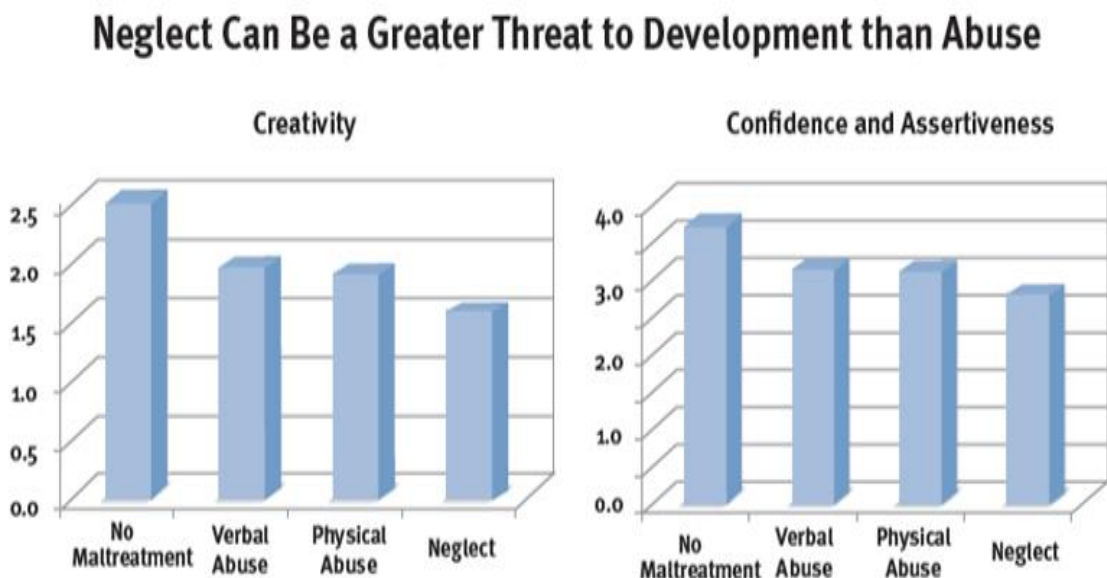
At age 3 ½, children who had experienced different types of maltreatment in the first year of life and a group that had not experienced any maltreatment were compared in a "barrier box" situation designed to evaluate children's responses to frustrating situations. In the scenario, toys were placed inside a box that could not be opened by a young child. Researchers observed the children's efforts to solve the challenge and rated them on a 3- or 7-point scale and then adjusted scores for time spent on task (median scores for each group are shown above). Results showed that neglected children had the greatest difficulty and lacked the creativity, confidence, and assertiveness to cope with the challenges they faced.

Source: Egeland, et al. (1983)[10]

Figure 9: Neglect is a greater threat to development than abuse.

Source : Egeland et al (1983)

However, there is also research carried out by Fisher *et al.*(2007) who suggested that a caring, supportive placement, enriched by a stable, supportive environment can have a profound influence on the child in care as long as it is continuous, and over a long period, for the child in care. (Figure 10)

Supportive Relationships Restore Disrupted Stress Response
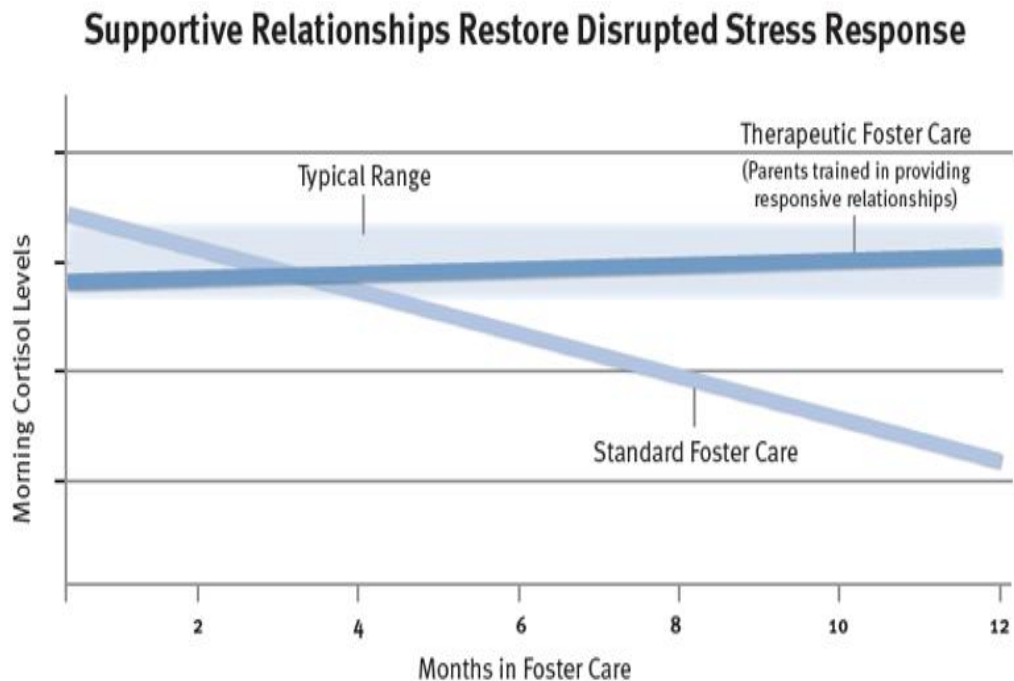
Figure 10: Supportive relationships restore disrupted stress response

Source: Fisher *et al.* (2007)

Children in care with a supportive environment and trained to build relationships experienced increased levels of the stress hormone cortisol, which reduced anxiety, and restored confidence and emotional stability (Fisher *et al.* 2007). Hence, there is biological evidence of both the existence of development disorder and the benefits of supportive relationships with the child in care.

> The research is clear that the experience of abuse and neglect leaves a particular traumatic fingerprint on the development of children that cannot be ignored if the child welfare system is to meaningfully improve the life trajectories of maltreated children, not merely keep them safe from harm. (Bryan Samuels 2011, Commissioner of the Administration on Children, Youth and Families, U.S. House of Representatives).

2.5.5 Timeframe of Assessment

The timeframe of assessment of the child in care's needs must be considered in depth. In the United Kingdom, Brown and Ward (2013) undertook a study on how maltreated children are dealt with in the UK judicial system, and found that there were considerable delays in assessment, judicial decisions, and actions that cumulatively became a barrier to optimising outcomes for maltreated children. They found that

> One of the most important issues to confront in promoting better outcomes for abused and neglected children is a mismatch between three timeframes: Those of the developing child, those of the courts, and those of the local authority…..sstudies that explored the consequences of professional decision-making in neglectful and/or abusive families all found that a high proportion of maltreated children are left in very damaging circumstances with inadequate action being taken to safeguard them, and with adverse consequences for their health and development. (Brown & Ward 2013. p.77 citing Farmer and Lutman 2012; Wade *et al.* 2011; Ward, Brown & Westlake 2012)

This has resonance in Ireland, since we have similar legislative proceedings and, without further research, we cannot ascertain what obstacles affect the educational attainment of foster children. However, we may take heed of a 2017 report by Ireland's Special Rapporteur for Child Protection, Dr Geoffrey Shannon,[18] on exercise of the Emergency Powers Act, citing delays in *Tusla*'s handling of a number of child care cases. The Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC) welcomed the report stating it demonstrates clearly how children are currently being failed by our State child protection systems.

> 'This is a report of enormous significance and urgent action is needed. The report describes a "persistent perception among a number of Garda respondents, that Tusla social workers sometimes delay addressing a particular risk to a child, in order to force the involvement of An Garda Síochána in the case due to the organisation's 24-hour operational basis'. (ISPCC 2017)[19]

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[18] The comprehensive audit undertaken by the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection Dr. Geoffrey Shannon. considered 591 cases in 2014 where the Gardaí exercised emergency powers under section 12 of the Child Care Act 1991, to remove a child to a place of safety. 91 examples of children for whom this power was exercised are described. It also included an audit of the emergency child protection powers in 2015.

[19] More information here athttps://www.ispcc.ie/campaigns-lobbying/publications/section-12-audit-briefing-ispcc-/16004

Figure 11 below summarises the influences in the process, person, context , time framework that identifies the influences on the personal traits and characteristics of a foster child.

Foster Child Personal Challenges

Alienation fear Disengagement. (Vacca 2008)

Scherr (2010) Family breakdown not in isolation...accompanied by poverty, neglect, attachment disorder. Undergo trauma like PTSD, externalize with behavior problems. Consequences of Neglect.

Deficits in neurological self-regulatory systems and social competence (Fisher, Gunnar, Dozier, Bruce, & Pears 2006).

Solomon, Niec *et al.* (2017) McClung and Gayle (2010) - Foster children often struggle socially, emotionally and need positive encouragement. Children who have survived trauma need loving and nurturing adults who can support them in their 'most troubling moments' (Statman-Weil 2015).

65% enter the care arrangement with friction, confusion and trauma. 55% stay on in further education. 27% relative carers.

Piaget (1932) - Socialization theory - children are relatively powerless and dependent on adults closest to them.

Durkheim (1982) - Teacher is the paramount socializing agent.

Mayall (2002); Penn (2005); Goodyear (2011) - Criticisms of Attachment Theory needs can be met in several ways.

Supportive frameworks may provide the compass normally given by family of origin - Jackson (2003); Happer et al. (2006); Gilligan (2000)

Tools to develop Resilience (Luke and Coyne 2008) and Self esteem

Foster children do not wish to be 'defined' by care (Moran *et al.* 2017) and want 'control' over their status, leading to a lack of representation in school.

Timescale of interventions for maltreated children is an obstacle - 3 timescales: judicial, childcare providers, and the child.

Figure 11: Process Person Context Time (PPCT)

Challenges for the foster child.

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The next section examines the microsystems that surround the foster child. This inner circle, which Brofenbrenner calls the microsystem, describes each setting in which the foster child has direct, face-to-face relationships with significant people such as parents, friends, and teachers and social workers. This is where students live their daily lives and each of the participants have an immediate influence on the foster child .

2.6 The Microsystem and the Foster Child.

The connection between the teacher and student is crucial to meeting the needs of the foster child. The importance of having positive relationships between these settings is considered essential for the developing person. (Bronfenbrenner 1994, p.645) and enables 'school personnel to perform their jobs more efficiently'.(Williams and Sanchez 2013, p.635). Higgins et al. (2008) note that this relationship can also help teachers to adapt their pedagogical approaches so that the needs of students are better met (p.53)

2.6.1 Underestimation of educational ability of the child in care.

Jackson and McParlin (2006) expressed concern that children in care were being stigmatised by the fact of 'being in care'. They stated that

> there is still a strong tendency to attribute poor academic achievement to the characteristics of the children, and the terminology used doesn't help. 'Special educational needs' is commonly interpreted by teachers and social workers to mean low intelligence. In relation to children in care these 'needs' are far more likely to refer to emotional and behavioural problems resulting from painful and confusing experiences and frequent moves between placements. Instead of addressing the underlying causes, however, schools generally resort to exclusion, or demand that the child should be transferred to a special school. (p.91)

Alongside this, teachers' attitudes also affect foster children's performance in school.

> Some teachers are unaware of or insensitive to their problems and do not offer proper encouragement. They may believe it is a waste of time to sustain commitments with these youth because they will not be with them for long. Other teachers may have the preconceived notion that children who are in foster care are not bright enough to profit from their efforts; therefore, they don't bother with them (Powers & Stotland2002 cited in Emerson & Lovitt 2003, p.200)

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Jackson and McParlin (2006) also referred to teachers' influence and how they frequently know nothing about the child's history and their training does not equip them with the tools to either understand or manage the behaviour of children in care. They state that 'pre-care experiences certainly play a part in depressing attainment, but so does the failure to address the aftermath of such experiences or the impact of separation when children are removed from their families' (p.94). The same criteria applies to social workers and foster carers as well as to teachers.

> Troubled children need relationships with adults who are committed to them. Foster care offers the chance of such relationships. It is a serious response to serious problems. It is valued and valuable (Sinclair 2005, p. 122).

Brady and Gilligan (2018) mined research from various sources (O'Higgins *et al.* 2017; Sebba *et al.* 2015; Jackson and Martin 2002) and identified the benefits of having a relationship with a 'trusted adult', within or without the care system to allow them 'feel valued'.

> this work provides further evidence of the critical role that foster carers (and other key adults) play in supporting the educational progress and outcomes of children in care. In addition to the importance of carers, some studies have also identified the key role that other 'significant' adults can play when it comes to the education of children and young people in care (Brady and Gilligan 2018, p.37)

2.6.2 Stability in school and Placement and direct effects on the child in care.

Rowe & Lambert, back in 1973, noted the importance of stability for children in care. They note that the development of secure attachments is a strong driving force behind efforts to have children adopted, so that they do not 'drift' in care. Kiersey (2012, p.8) states that this situation can be further heightened where children in care have been excluded from school. In many cases of instability, the securing of a care place is deemed to be the priority and placed well ahead of any consideration of the educational needs of children in care (Hayden 2005). The potential future effects of such frequent moving and its resultant disruption to education has been highlighted by Ward and Holmes (2008)

Concerns have been raised that the frequent changes of placement and key personnel, endemic in the care system, compound the instability experienced by many children before entry to care, thereby reinforcing a self-image of transience that is detrimental to their ability to form secure and lasting relationship in adulthood (p. 88).

Research studies (Biehal *et al.* 1995) have shown how placement stability can contribute positively to educational outcomes. Stability does not just refer to placements alone but also to the wider world of children in care's lives. Stability should incorporate the stability and continuity of school places, activities and healthcare as well as a stable home life as much as possible (Kiersey 2012, p8). Welbourne & Leeson (2012) sum up the need for the combination of both stability and a focused approach to education.

professional support with emotional and educational problems appears, unsurprisingly, to be an effective way of helping children avoid educational underachievement as well as behavioural and emotional difficulties.(p. 137).

The child requires a secure base to establish positive relationships, and this can be detrimentally affected by serial-attachment experiences. While frequent changes of caregivers may be painful and anxiety-provoking for the child (Thompson 1998; Schofield and Beek 2005), Darmody *et al.* (2013, p.29) also comments on the necessity of stability and the importance of the school as a constant force in the foster child's life:

For many children in care, school may be one of the most constant factors in their lives and a place where they can feel like 'everybody else'. Schools also have the potential to provide an additional place where they can develop skills and self-confidence, receive praise and encouragement, make friends, achieve success, and obtain educational qualifications (p.29)

Roarty *et al.* (2018) also refers to stability of placement and states the importance of stability and permanence for children in care, identifying that

the main factors that were found to influence permanence and stability were relationships, communication, support and continuity. The research shows that it is not only the connection between the child and

the foster family or parent that matters. Instead, the whole system
surrounding the child must also be considered. (p.52)

However, stable placements are unlikely to be enough to help most children overcome educational difficulties, even with additional support in school. (Welbourne *et al.* 2012, p.137). Sonia Jackson in 1998 encouraged a widening of the child in care's social circle, to provide a wider horizon to offer alternative models of family life and relationships. (Jackson 1998, p.49).

2.6.3 Importance of Peer Groups and other stakeholders on self-esteem

McMahon and Curtain (2013) conducted a long-term study on foster care children while in care, and when they had left care, and found that the largest influence in terms of emotional support were 'birth siblings' and 'friends' followed by 'fosterparents'. For the left-care group, the largest group were 'other friends', then 'birth siblings' followed by 'foster parents'(p.334). The difference was explained by the disengagement with the formal school structure and the extracurricular activities that were associated with school, birth siblings, foster parents and friends. The literature also indicates the importance of, and benefits from, the involvement in formal social groups and activities for young people who have experience of the care system. (Emerson and Lovitt (2003), and Gilligan (1999; 2001), cited in McMahon and Curtain (2013)

> Frequent placement moves also impacts negatively on the young
> people's contact with friends from pre-care and previous placements.
> Both being admitted to care and changing placements can result in a
> change in school. For some of the study group, this resulted in negative
> experiences and perceptions in the school system. (p.336)

2.6.4 Foster children's 'invisible' representation in school context.

Vacca (2008) is of the view that the education of foster children is often overlooked, and they are one of the most educationally vulnerable populations in our schools (p.1080). He goes on to state that policies should be put in place at national, State and local levels that support effective educational reforms and innovative practices. Brodie (2000) cited by Kiersey (2012, p.26) also mentioned the under representation of foster children in the

schooling system as they are usually only representing 'a tiny minority in any one school and may not, in fact, be perceived as a distinct group or expected to present problems' (p.26). Hence, they may neither have agency nor representativeness. Vacca (2008, p.1082) states that foster parents are unprepared to negotiate services and, again amplifying an earlier point, that very little information about a student's educational background and their academic needs is shared among the foster parents, schools and caseworkers.

The problem of agency and representativeness is mirrored in Ireland. Darmody *et al.* (2013, p 30) refer to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which Ireland ratified in 1992. The CRC stipulates that education is recognised as a basic human right for all children, noting Article 28(1) which encourages the development of different forms of education and taking appropriate action in cases of need. However, Darmody *et al.* (2013) go on to state

> that even though enquiries were made to the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB), Educational Research Centre (ERC) and Department of Education and Skills (DES), all responses were negative, confirming that the data does not treat children in care separately from all other children (p.30).

The problem is compounded by the foster child's urge to be seen as an individual not defined by their 'care status', and who sought control over what information others had on them (Jackson 1998, p.48)

> This means, for example, that social workers should find ways of communicating with teachers which don't advertise the fact that a child is in care. Teachers need to understand the special circumstances of looked after children without 'making allowances', assuming that they will be of lower ability, or picking them out in any way. (Jackson 2008, p.48).

This view of children in care within schools has a tendency to render their problems invisible to a certain extent. This is a major obstacle to educational attainment for foster children because if they are not identified, then the necessary supports may not be offered. In turn, the supports may not be evaluated in any meaningful way, leading to the present lack of relevant data that could be used to target further resource allocation to enable foster children close the educational attainment gap.

2.6.5 The creation of a positive school climate.

With the likelihood of extensive emotional and behavioural problems and educational obstacles, it is no easy task for schools to meet the needs of children who live in foster care. It is suggested that school-based interventions involve collaboration among stakeholders (child welfare, school, and home), and address internalising and externalising behaviours as well as academic deficits (Scherr 2010). Teachers should be notified of a student's foster care status so that they can collaborate with the appropriate stakeholders, However, this is not always the case. Klein (1932) spoke of children being born with the epistomophilic instinct, which is the innate desire to learn. Further research has indicated that having a secure attachment to a caregiver enables the learning process by allowing a child to feel safe enough to take learning risks (Ainsworth *et al.* 1978). There has been research on parental expectations (Desforges 2004), parenting styles (Baumrind 1966), having an interested and supportive teacher (Gilligan 2000) and scaffolding theory (Vygotsky 1978).

Therefore, what is clear from the research is that learning is an interactive process. Therefore, success is reliant upon both within child, social, and environmental factors. Indeed, the school itself is regarded as a constant in the turbulent lives of those at the margins. For example, not only with foster children but also with those that are in emergency accommodation, (Keogh *et al.* 2006, p.360) state that 'despite the many difficulties involved in maintaining children's regular school attendance, it is evident that school may represent the only stability for a child in an otherwise insecure and changing routine'.

There is also research that suggests that educational failure is not inevitable and shows that some children do well in school and go on to lead successful adult lives (see Daly and Gilligan 2005, p.37). 'More than anything, children who have survived trauma need loving and nurturing adults who can support them in their most troubling moments' (Statman-Weil 2015, p.77). Loftus (2017) also identify the influence of school climate and teachers in pupil engagement and educational attainment stating that:

school climate appears to actively shape student motivation: students who have negative relationships with teachers seem to withdraw from engagement with school work, which subsequently leads them to leave school early. (Byrne & Smyth, 2010:63-66). The conclusion is clear: early school leaving is influenced by social class background, with the highest rates of drop out found among young people from non-employed, semi/unskilled manual and skilled manual households. Social class should not be considered in isolation from gender since it is largely working-class boys who leave school early. (Loftus 2017, p.17)

LaCour *et al.* (2016) studied 61 teachers in the US to determine perceptions and best practices when educating foster children. She concluded that establishing a positive, caring classroom environment that supports the needs of the foster child is imperative to academic success. The positive impact on behaviour can lead to the foster child developing the skills necessary to engage in positive interactions with others, and developing a positive classroom environment offers foster children an even greater opportunity to succeed.

Establishing a positive, caring classroom environment which supports the needs of the foster child is imperative to academic success. Encouragement, which focuses on specific tasks and indicates that the teacher believes in the student, can boost the student's self-esteem and confidence resulting in a positive impact on the student's behaviour (Manning & Bucher, 2013). This positive impact on behaviour can lead to the foster child developing the skills necessary to engage in positive interactions with others.(La Cour *et al.* p.142, 2016).

She proceeds to state that

Through the implementation of discussions, relationships, role play, and peer share, teachers can positively impact student behaviour while building connections with the student. Lastly, by providing appropriate homework assignments, the teacher can help build a positive relationship between the foster parent and the foster child. (La Cour et al. p. 147, 2016).

'Children who have secure attachments learn to trust their emotions and trust their understanding of the world around them'(Statman-Weil 2015, p.73). This reflects the recurring themes of stability in care and relationships hat is of paramount importance for the foster child. The implementation of these best practices helps facilitate the academic

success of the foster child. 'Effective teaching skills consist of high levels of student engagement based on good classroom management skill' (Jordan *et al.* 2009, p.537). These characteristics are a professional attitude to teaching, a consistency of approach (see also Jenkinson, 2011), flexibility and responsiveness with individuals as well as high standards of classroom management. Good subject knowledge, high expectations for pupils' achievement and well-paced lessons, are among the factors that contribute to positive relationships between teachers and pupils. Additionally, acting upon evidence from teaching and learning to inform future teaching is particularly important (Visser, 2000). In a nutshell, teachers should be well prepared.

However creating the right climate needs school improvement which is a specific branch of the study of educational change. It has been defined as 'a distinct approach to educational change that enhances student outcomes as well as strengthening the school's capacity for managing change' (Hopkins 2005, p. 3). School improvement theory is based on the assumption that internal conditions in the school are a vital key element in accomplishing educational goals.

Underpinning the process is the notion that if the internal conditions in the school are improved, the chances of students achieving their potential will also be improved. There is a growing recognition that schools can impact both positively and negatively on student outcomes. Hence school improvement research has proved to be increasingly influential and powerful (Harris 2014).

The OECD comment that there is now a growing awareness that 'one-size-fits-all' approaches to school knowledge and organisation are ill-adapted both to individuals' needs and to the knowledge society at large' (OECD 2006).

2.6.6 Educational benefits of 'being in care'.

Interestingly there appears no benefit academically to being in care according to a recent study by O'Higgins *et al.* (2015).

> it (the review) highlights that children do not appear to benefit academically from being in care. Indeed, only two studies found that children in care were performing better than their peers, after a number of disadvantages had been considered (Berger *et al.*, 2015; McClung & Gayle, 2010.). This should be a concern for researchers, practitioners

and policy-makers. Krebs and Pitcoff (2004, p. 365) remind us that "the foster care system must be fully accountable for what happens to [young people] in its custody" and it is important to hold the care system accountable for providing young people with opportunities to succeed. (p.5)

However, Jackson & Cameron, (2012, p.1108) conducted a study across five European countries, interviewing people who had left care. The conclusion was that foster care seemed to lead to better promotion of educational attainment, and that young people who were most successful in formal education had engaged to a greater extent in leisure/culture activities, providing opportunities for informal learning (e.g. via hobbies, volunteering, extracurricular activities). The barriers were the lack of joined up thinking between social services and education, lack of teacher support, low expectations from social workers, and mental health issues. Again, this tallies with other research which suggests that placement in foster care results in improved educational success and experiences (McClung & Gayle 2010; Runyan & Gould 1985). However. as Cage (2018) states, there is a dearth of literature that compares the rates of high school completion for maltreated youth with and without foster care experience.

2.6.7 Recommendations for teachers.

Research recommendations from a cross-section of US studies focus on training for carers, improved information sharing, getting background information on students, assisting the students' resilience and supporting their independence, helping the child to access special programs, coordinating with the multiple stakeholders, better identification and treatment of mental health problems that impact on educational outcomes, and better advocacy and preparation for continuing with education in college or university (Zetlin *et al.* 2004, 2006; Allen & Vacca 2010; Bruce *et al.* 2010; Pecora 2012).

Figure 12 below summarises the effects on the microenvironment of the foster child.

MICROSYSTEM
Immediate Influence

Family of Origin

Foster Family

Peer Network

FOSTER CHILD

RESILIENCE GENETICS

Neighborhood

Allocated Social Worker(s)
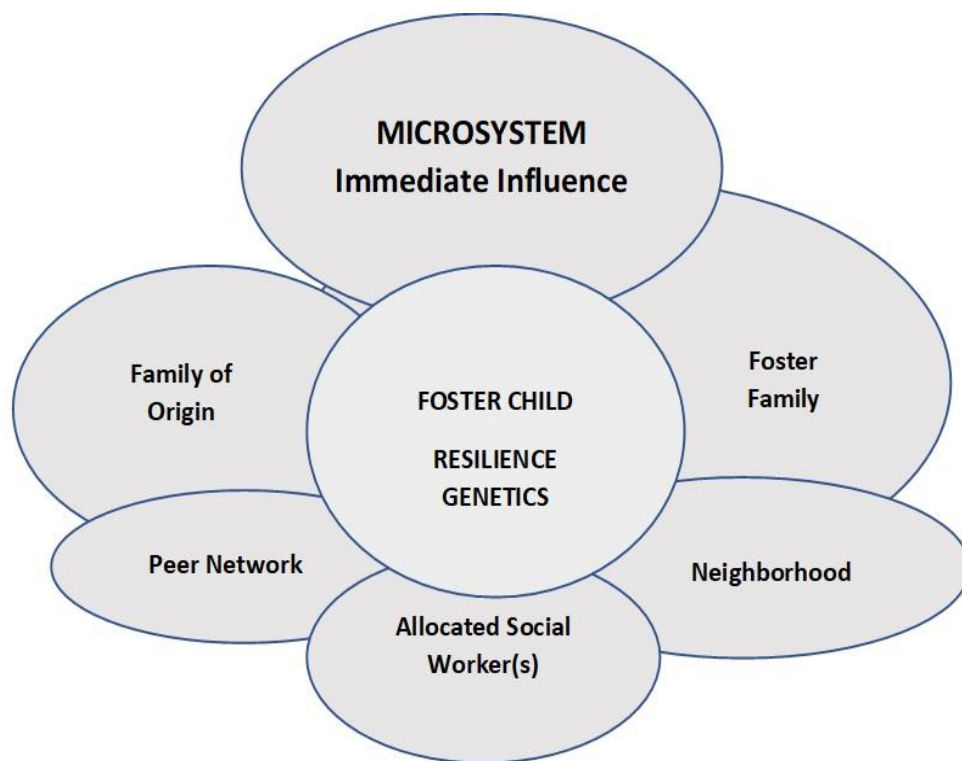
- Calvin (2001) - Education of caregivers an influence; Disruption in school change

- Powers and Stotland (2001) - Teachers may not 'waste' time, and perception that foster children are not bright. However, conditions can be implemented for best practice (Solomon 2017)

- Vacca (2008) - Bi-Direction foster parents need to negotiate. Foster children disengage so school needs to provide a stable environment. Necessity of teacher-student relationship. Stability of school and placement essential for self-esteem of foster children.

- Moran *et al.* (2017) note that foster children need high levels of support when at the early stage of placement.

- Lack of accountability in state bodies, which directly impinge on motivation of social workers, and how they then interact with foster children. Cannot acquire/keep social workers. High turnover of staff negatively affects relationship building with all stakeholders and, in particular with foster children.

- Successful relationships with their social worker If they 'look beyond' the labels of being 'in care' and as 'looked after' by the State (Moran *et al.* 2017). This is comparable to the international literature around matching, which shows that when the needs of the child and the expectations of foster carers and children are met, placements endure for longer (Stott and Gustavsson 2010).

- Peers in school, and outside, are a primary source of emotional support and 'normalising' of foster children. Extra- curricular activities. Children need peers outside of the care system to broaden horizons and motivate educational engagement.

- Unequal relationship between foster carers, and social workers and teachers. Foster carers and parents of origin, may lack agency.

- The concept of 'regulation' was also commented on by many foster carers in relation to foster carer identity. Many foster carers said that over-emphasis on regulation detracts from giving children a loving home.

Figure 12: Microsystem of the Foster Child

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2 .7 The Mesosystem and the Foster Child.

The mesosystem represents the interrelationships between the various stakeholders - teachers, social workers, foster parents, parents of origin and when necessary, guardians ad litem, that directly affect the child in care and their educational engagement and attainment. Ordinarily, there are cross-relationships between these small settings (parents talk to teachers, for example) and these lateral connections, which have a direct influence on the foster child's well-being, are called the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner 1979, p.25). The importance of having positive relationships between these settings is considered essential for the developing person. (Bronfenbrenner 1994, p.645).

2.7.1 Stakeholder involvement in Education.

In the *Guide to Whole School Evaluation in Post-Primary Schools* published by the Department of Education (2006 p.2) WSE is described as 'a collaborative process involving the teaching staff, the management of the school, parents, and students'.

The suggestion is made that all members of the school community will have the opportunity to discuss their work, their role, and their vision for the school with the inspectors. This confirms the embracing of the multiple stakeholders involved and their input in the evaluative process. McNamara and O'Hara (2008) suggest that there have been 'a number of attempts to develop a comprehensive framework of school evaluation that includes all elements of the emerging dialogue in a structure that demonstrates their relationship' (p.107). The literature also suggests that all evaluation activity – external or internal, must actively engage the school community if it is to be effective in bringing about necessary change.

This speaks to concerns raised by evaluation theorists about how stakeholders are identified. For example, Guba and Lincoln's (1989) fourth generation evaluation insists that all possible stakeholders should be involved, whereas Cousins (2003) takes an approach which argues that the stakeholders should be those with the power to use the evaluation findings, the established decision-makers. Mertens (2013, p.27) highlights that 'credibility in evaluation is a multifaceted concept that involves consideration of diverse stakeholders' perspectives and purposes'. The premise is to engage all interested parties

in a dialogue about what matters in their school, how it can be evaluated and responding to the findings to improve the school. There are multiple influences on the child's development, and hence multiple stakeholder issues are dominant. For example, Section 37 of the Child Care Act 1991 obliges the HSE, in foster care cases, to facilitate reasonable access to the child by his or her parents, by any person acting in loco parentis in respect of the child or by any person who has a bona fide interest in the child.

Furthermore, it is necessary to consider the ecological system context that frames and influences the foster child's educational trajectory. This research leans heavily on Moran *et al.'s* (2017) study on the outcomes for foster children in care when they state that

> Factors affecting children's outcomes for permanence and stability were found both within the young person's microsystem and in their wider ecological system, such as their family, their locality and their relationship with their informal and formal support systems (Moran *et al.* 2017, p.17)

The research affirms the importance of factors like the young person's emotional engagement with the foster parents, good external supports and positive relationships with siblings and peers.

The importance of continuity not only in the placement but also in the support around it is a critical message in the findings. Three core factors had the most significant impact on children and young people's sense of permanence stability in care: relationships: the child's relationships with their social workers or child care support system, relationships with the family of origin and their foster family; social support: the level and quality of support from social work teams and aftercare, support from family members (e.g. foster carers and family of origin) and other support systems; and communication: between social workers, members of the foster family, the family of origin and the young person. Underpinning these components is a strong interconnecting theme of the importance of the continuity of the placement and continuity of support for the young person in care. (Moran *et al.*2017, p.68)

For children in care, they can find themselves interacting at a multi-systems level overlapping to different degrees between their family of origin as well as their foster family. Also, all young people said they need support from foster carers and social

workers during the early stages of placements. Moving into the 'strangers' house' is an emotional process for young people (Moran et al 2017, p34) Young people felt that care placements were when they were still learning about the family and who to trust. Similar accounts of emotional difficulties experienced by young people going into care are outlined in Winter (2012).

The concept of 'regulation' was also commented on by many foster carers in relation to foster carer identity. Many foster carers said that over-emphasis on regulation detracts from giving children a loving home. Foster carers also said that power imbalances adversely affect communication with child welfare systems. In this regard, foster carer interviews are broadly comparable to young people's opinions on how power and authority affects communication with social work teams (p.46) Some carers also commented on what they saw as 'a lack of joined-up thinking' in child welfare systems (Moran *et al.* 2017, p.46).

Foster carers and young people were found to have better relationships with social workers when communication is open, and when foster carers listen and engage with them. In the Irish context, O'Brien (2002, p.66), makes similar comments about the importance of 'respect, collaboration and accountability' in child welfare systems.

2.7.2 The Guardian ad Litem service

Another significant stakeholder is the Guardian *ad Litem* (GAL), who represents children in the court system. Section 26 of the Child Care Act 1991provides for the appointment of a guardian ad litem in respect of care proceedings where a child is not a party to those proceedings and where the court is satisfied that it is necessary in the best interests of the child, and in the interests of justice, to have a guardian ad litem appointed (Barnados 2018). A Guardian *ad litem* (Latin: 'for the lawsuit') has been defined as 'an independent representative appointed by the court to represent the child's personal and legal interests in legal proceedings' (*The Law Society Law Reform Committee* 2006, p.73). The role of the guardian ad litem has also been identified as involving 'investigator, child's advocate, negotiator, resource broker' (O'Kane 2006, p.157). The law governing the role of guardians ad litem is skeletal (it is currently being developed by the Department of

Children and Youth Affairs (Coulter 2018, p.92) An overview of the Guardian *ad litem* service in Ireland can be viewed in Appendix

2.7.3 (Foster) Parent's role in Education

There is much research carried out on the positive role that parents have on a child educational development. Desforges (2004) highlighted that parental involvement was at the heart of academic achievement, and has more influence on attainment than supportive measures implemented by the school alone. Also, Fan and Chen (2001) found that the factor that had the most impact on academic attainment, apart from socio-economic status, was parental aspirations for their child. They also indicated that there was an apparent positive feedback loop effect for aspirations in that the better a child performed at school, the higher the aspirations held by their parent.

Under the terms of the *National Standards for Foster Care (2003)*, contact and access between the child in foster care and their birth family must be promoted and facilitated. 'Health boards provide practical support to family members and friends to facilitate contacts, such as adequate assistance with transport arrangements and costs.' This accords with the principles of parents of origin as the primary influences on a child's socialisation. The support and management of relationships with siblings and families of origin have a significant impact on young people's overall sense of stability (Moran *et al.* 2017, p.16). However, this principle can make it difficult to make decisions on the reduction of access if it is deemed a negative influence. There is no stated parallel standard when detrimental to the child in care.

2.7.4 Stability in Care in Ireland

The attrition of key social workers also affects the stability of the child in care as evidenced by Welborne *et al.* (2012) who comment that the stability of the social worker is important as well as stability of care. The quality of the relationships between children in care, their teachers, social workers and carers are important to ensure their continuity and success (Celeste 2009; Leeson 2009 cited in Welbourne *et al.* 2012, p.136) They also noted that stability is not enough on its own: children do not achieve good results in every

stable placement, and carers and children need quality support to promote progress (p.136). Good relationships with social workers can enhance the educational experience of children in care and connecting with 'at least one person within or outside the care system, who made time to listen to them and make them feel valued helped to enhance the educational experiences of children in care.'(Martin and Jackson, 2002, p.128).

It would not be unreasonable to suggest that where the HSE fails to appoint a social worker or link worker, the foster carer, and the school often step into the role of the social worker, guidance counsellor, and advocate. The foster carer and/or school assumes a quasi-professional role by default and not by desire. (Irish Foster Carers Association, 2011)

While placement in foster care in Ireland is considered high (relative to other countries), 11% of those discharged from care returned to their home/family, and 46% remained with carers. (Figure 13) Interestingly, whereas 90% of children in care are still in full-time education at seventeen, the number of those who voluntarily availed of the aftercare services in care between 18 and 20 years old dropped by a quarter. Hence 25% or 300 foster children exited at 18 without any aftercare service (and there are no statistics for this quotient.) However, of 1,329 who exited care 1,000 maintained some contact and of this, 58% were still in full-time education. This compares favourably with the 60% rate for non-foster children according to the Higher Education Authority 2016/2017[20] However, there are no statistics to state in which level of further education foster children are enrolled.

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[20] http://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2018/01/HEA-Key-Facts-And-Figures-2016-17-.pdf
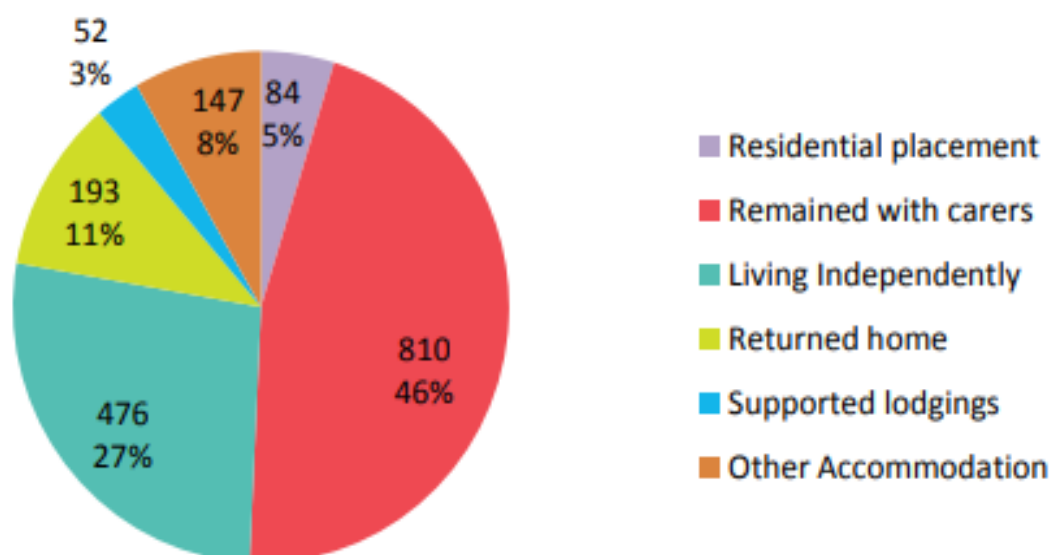
Figure 13: Placement in Aftercare.2015

Source: Review of Adequacy in respect of Child Care and Family Support Services,

Tusla 2015

Furthermore, according to 2015 *Tusla* figures, the number of foster children engaging in some form of further education was an average of 58%.[21] Also, 38% of the 6,500 children were in care for more than five years, while 43% were in care between one and five years. Less than 2% nationally were on their third placement within a year. 46% were still resident with their foster carers after the age of 18, indicating stability. This contrasts favourably with England and Wales, where they report 11% in a third or greater placement. Hence according to *Tusla* (2013, p.49) 'placements in Ireland were substantially more stable'

This compares well internationally based on US and UK experiences for examples in the US. Pecora *et al.* (2006) highlights the high risk of school failure among this group. The school itself may also have been a negative experience, and there may have been frequent moves to alternative schools and periods of non-attendance. Similarly, Barnardos Policy and Research Unit (2006) in the UK highlighted the poor experience and low educational achievement of young people in the care system. They focused on the low numbers of young people from a care background who go on to third level education (estimated

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[21]   http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/S8_Review_of_Adequacy_Final.pdf   Accessed 20/02/17

number of 1% of the whole population of care leavers, compared to 37% of all young people), and the high rates of exclusion from school within this group. Similarly, the 55% rate of inclusion in further education differs substantially from international studies. Some research evidence highlights the very low proportion (1%) of care-leavers who enter higher education (Fletcher-Campbell 1997). In the United Kingdom, research shows that only 3% of care leavers obtain five GCSE passes at grade level C or above, compared with over 60% in general, or non-care, school population, while fewer than one in 100 students in care enters higher education (Fletcher-Campbell 1997).

2.7.4.1 Length of time in care

Other factors that increase stability in the foster child is the length of time in care. Roarty *et al.* (2018) state:

> The main factors that were found to influence permanence and stability were relationships, communication, support and continuity___ permanence is a practical reality, as well as a feeling of security and stability. It is important that children and young people experience stability in care (p.52)

Figure 14 demonstrates that 43% of Irish children were in a placement for over 5 years and another 42% between 1 and 5 years, indicating stable placement. which *Tusla* has emphasised as one of the long-term predictors of educational success. Welbourne (2012, p.136) attests to the benefits of 'being in care' noting that although there is general improvement in overall well-being of children in care during time in care (Forrester *et al.* 2009), in the case of educational achievement the effect reduces with age, with later entry predicting poorer results. In Ireland the number of children in care increases with age so this is a factor in the educational attainment gap. However, the implication is that on balance the time in care can mitigate the negative effects of the age when coming into care.

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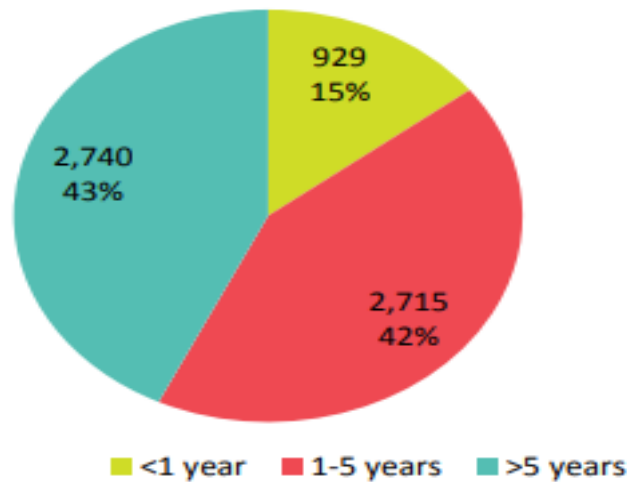
Figure 14: Time spent in care. 2015

Source: Review of Adequacy in respect of Child Care and Family Support Services

Tusla 2015

2.7.4.2 Age in care

Welbourne *et al.* (2012) noted that the age and timing of entry to the care system suggests some reasons why children in care may do so much worse educationally than their non-care peers (p.131) and Irish statistics on age and timing of entry into care indicates that older children enter care in greater numbers (Figure 15).
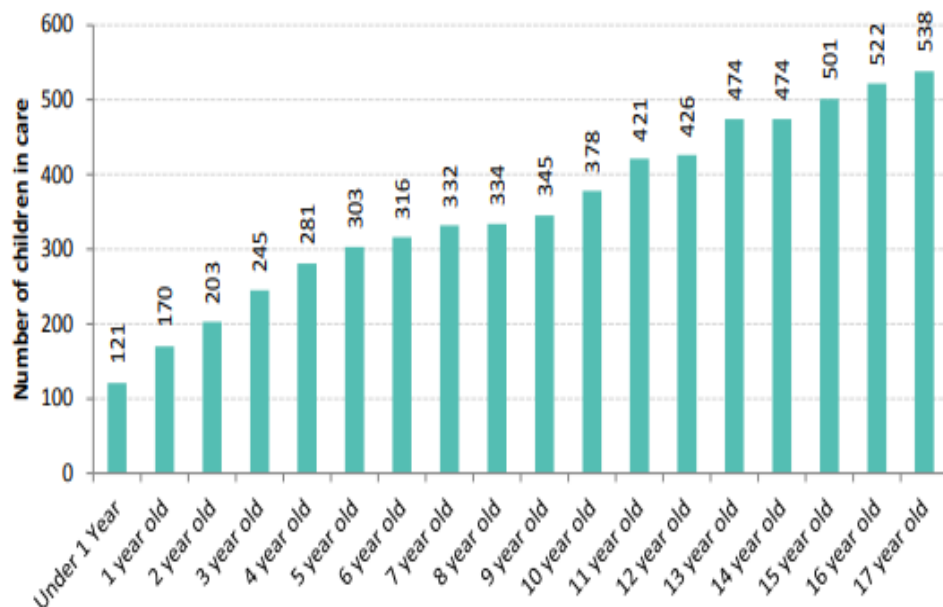
Figure 15: Age when entering Care. 2015.

Source: Review of Adequacy in respect of Child Care and Family Support Services

Tusla 2015

Welbourne *et al.* (2012, p.131) provides an apt analysis on the difficulties attached to the age of coming into care

> Heath *et al.* (1994) found that children in care were progressing educationally at the same rate as other children, but because of their initial academic disadvantage they did not catch up. This left them behind their peers, despite working just as hard. Children in care do not fail to progress, but they have difficulty making up prior deficits, which leaves them unrewarded by the work they do (Forrester, 2008; Gaskell, 2010; Harker *et al.*, 2004a)(p.131)

Roarty *et al.* (2018) also identified that

> 'a lot of evidence was found to suggest that a child's age at entry into care made a big impact – younger children were more likely to achieve long-term permanence and stability than children placed as teenagers, for example. However, overall it is, in fact, very difficult to predict if a placement is going to be stable and permanent as many factors affect each individual case'.(p.53)

In Ireland, since increasingly older children enter care in greater numbers. this may affect their ability to 'catch up' with their academic peers. They may have experienced more negative experiences and may also display challenging behaviour, brought on by educational dis-engagement prior to entering care (Scherr 2007; OFSTED 2008; Allen and Vacca 2010; Emerson and Lovitt 2007; O'Higgins *et al.* (2015). Correspondingly, the older children are when they enter care, the more supports that may need, which will put a strain on resources, which may lead to service gaps.

2.7.5 Reasons to be in care

Figure 16 shows why children enter care in Ireland. Neglect and emotional trauma were the frequent reasons followed by physical and sexual abuse. Also, worth noting is the legal basis of admissions to care. Of the 6,151 children in care, 35% of admissions to care during 2015 were admitted under a voluntary care arrangement. The remainder of admissions into care were following an application to court and a breakdown of the court orders. However according to Coulter (2018) who carried out an extensive review of Irish child protection court cases, 'only 20% were contested'(p.1). This means that in these

20% of cases (representing 1,200 children) there was dissent, friction and a lack of agreement which, of course, has an influence on the foster child's subsequent development and educational, social and mental wellbeing. In the other 45% of cases there were also varying degrees of trauma for the foster child.

Category	2013	2014	2015	Δ(+/-) 2015 vs. 2014
Physical	4,330 (22%)	4,066 (22%)	3,991 (22%)	-75 (-2%)
Emotional	5,271 (27%)	6,233 (33%)	6,535 (36%)	+302 (+5%)
Sexual	3,385 (17%)	3,114 (17%)	2,940 (16%)	-174 (-6%)
Neglect	6,421 (33%)	5,263 (28%)	4,769 (26%)	-494 (-9%)
Total	19,407	18,676	18,235	-441
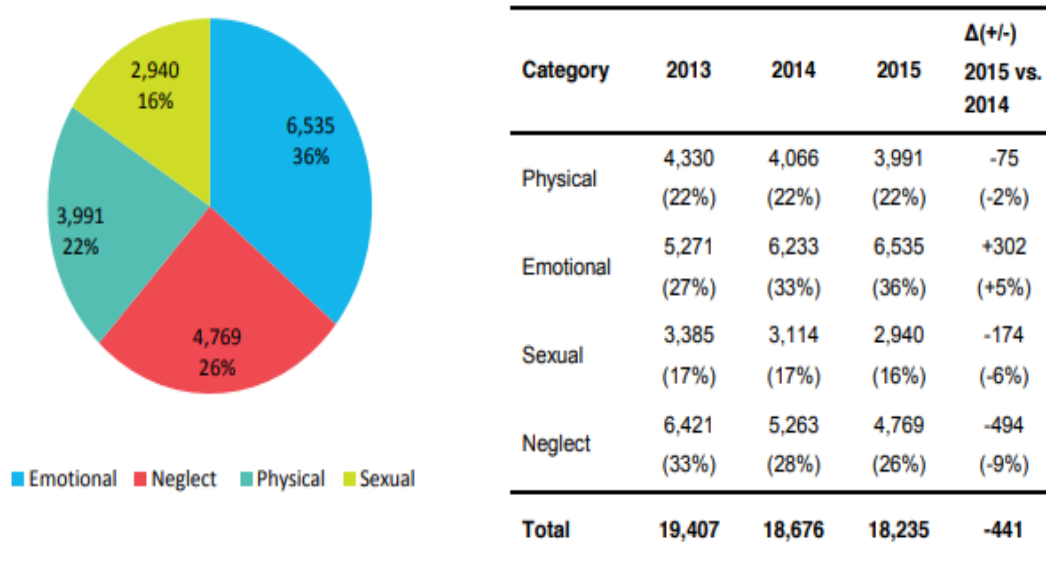
Figure 16: Reasons and Causes for being in care.2015

Source: Review of Adequacy in respect of Child Care and Family Support Services

Tusla 2015

2.7.6 School Responbility

In the case of Ireland, recent research has argued that difficulties in schooling and education experienced by children living in care lie 'far more in the care and education systems than in the children themselves' (Jackson and McParlin 2006, p.91 as referenced by *Tusla* in their *Adequacy report* 2015). This corresponds with Loftus (2017) who found that

> One of the strongest findings to emerge from studies looking at the relationship between different elements of socio-economic and educational disadvantage is that it is a gradual, accumulative process that occurs over time. With appropriate and well-timed interventions, this is a process that can be interrupted. Many of the factors associated with educational disadvantage are largely within the control of schools (Loftus 2017, pp.2-3)

This however is a contentious point and leads back to the reasons for lack of educational success for foster children, whether the problems with educational attainment predate care and are consequences of neglect (Berridge *et al.* 2008; Fostering Network 2006; Berridge 2012b; Welbourne & Leeson 2012.) or whether they are based on the shortcomings of the educational system (Jackson and McParlin 2006; Comfort 2007).

Comfort (2007, p.29) argues that the belief that a stable placement will solve problems with education ''is a misconception'. Moreover, there are approximately 6,150 children in the care of the State in Ireland, but little is known about their educational experiences and outcomes (Darmody, McMahon, Banks 2013; Daly and Gilligan 2010) However, it does motivate the educational system to provide supports to engineer optimum educational attainment for disadvantaged youth including foster children. Welbourne *et al.* (2012, p.131) note 'children in care more often have educational issues that are predictors of poorer-than-average outcomes, such as school exclusion and truancy and they are eight times more likely to be excluded from school (OFSTED, 2008)'. Also, Cage (2018, p.235) references high school completion as being 'one of the most promising mechanisms for mitigating the effects of maltreatment and subsequent foster care placement (*Casey Family Programs 2003*). In summation,

> the relevance for children in care is clear: many enter care after traumatic experiences. coming from socio-economically stressed families and coming into care is itself often traumatic (Beckett and McKeigue, 2009). The same emotional and intellectual attributes that children need to cope with the demands of being in care and education may have been impaired by prior experiences. Although they may span the full range of academic ability (Jackson and Martin, 1998), they include a high proportion of children with specific educational difficulties.' (Welbourne et al 2012, p.133)

Therefore, like that of the United Kingdom, Ireland's policy to address educational disadvantage has centred on additional resources and supports for schools serving disadvantaged children. Smyth *et al.* (2015) conducted a report for the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) on the implications for The Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme, which was introduced in 2006 to bring together a number of earlier stand-alone schemes which addressed specific aspects of educational disadvantage. This was complemented by the School Completion Programme

(SCP) and The Home School Liaison Programme (HSCL) service under the remit of the Educational Welfare Service in *Tusla*.

> The rationale for this approach is the existence of a 'multiplier effect', whereby students attending a school with a concentration of students from disadvantaged backgrounds have poorer academic outcomes, even taking account of individual social background.' (Smyth *et al.* 2015, p.vi)

Smyth *et al.* (2015) found that existing evaluations point to variation among DEIS schools in student outcomes, coupled with the lack of data on the social profile of individual students makes it difficult to measure the achievement gap specifically for disadvantaged students, and to capture the additional effect of the concentration of disadvantage in a school on achievement (the so-called 'multiplier effect'). (p.ix) Loftus (2017, p.10) cites Smyth & McCoy (2009,p.58)

> who found that a considerable proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds attend non-DEIS schools. School targeting alone cannot, therefore, address the needs of all children and young people in the relevant groups.

They argue that there is a 'need for joined-up planning and provision between education, health and welfare services in addressing the holistic development of children'(Loftus 2017,p.10). Figure 23 summarises the myriad of lateral connections that may require to be 'joined up' to positively affect a foster child's educational attainment.

Mesosystem Interrelationships
Direct Influence

TUSLA

Family of Origin

Foster Family

Fisher *et al.* (2000), McDonald, Burgess and Smith (2003), Golding (2004), Minnis and Devine (2001), and Pithouse *et al.* (2002) - Ways to support foster carers to support the needs of foster children.

Bi-directional relationships and the power relations between stakeholders.

Paradigm shift to positioning children as members of society, with rights, and implementing all aspect of the Children's Act 1991 allows advocacy. Participatory rights of children.

Increased use of the Emergency Powers Act by An Garda Síochána, citing delays in *Tusla*'s handling of child cases (Shannon 2017)

Children First Act 2017 on mandatory reporting of instances of abuse.

Irwin (2009) - carers noted poor communication with social workers, difficulties in accessing information, and difficulties in accessing services, speech and language occupational therapists etc. 'if you ask for help then you can't cope'.

Connell (2009); Scourfield *et al.* (2001,2003,2006) - Gender issues; Men marginalized.

In an evaluative context, schools should embrace all stakeholders to facilitate the educational remit (Guba and Lincoln 1989; *Guide to Whole School evaluation* 2006; Mertins 2013)

National foster care Standards - access to birth family 'must' be encouraged and facilitated. There is no parallel standard when this is deemed a negative influence.

Sense of Continuity necessary (Moran et al. 2017) - High Placement in further education (58%).

Age, length of time in care, continuity of placement - vital predictors of educational success

Tension between stakeholders who are responsible for attainment gap (educational system or predating characteristics of neglect trauma)

Peers

Guardian ad litem

School

Figure 17: Mesosystem for Foster Child

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2.8. Exosystem of the Foster Child.

The outer layer of institutions and processes that are indirectly involved in the foster child's development is called the exosystem (Bronfenbrenner 1979, p.25). It can include all indirect influences that affect the relationships in the mesosystem, hence external influences like funding, resourcing issues and supports are included here. These affect the participants in the mesosystem and ultimately in the microsystem. While the exosystem does not involve the individual student as an active participant, influences outlined can have a significant bearing on their engagement with education and thereby their educational outcomes.

2.8.1 Service Gaps and Staff Attrition in Tusla.

In January 2016, *Tusla* and the Irish Foster Care Association (IFCA)[22] initiated a process of consultation between two stakeholder groups - foster carers and social workers - in order to proactively identify service gaps from a national perspective (*Tusla* and IFCA 2016, p.2). In their briefing paper, they acknowledged the services gaps as predominantly down to staff shortages and as a remedy proposed that:

> building staff capacity is a core component in *Tusla*'s 2015-17 corporate plan and is integrally tied to the organisation's ability to assess needs, strategically plan services, and monitor and evaluate outcomes.(p.19).

Consultations highlighted significant capacity constraints in relation to current levels of social worker staffing in numerous regions. In these areas, staffing was considered inadequate to meet demand and also deliver the appropriate quality of care. They also listed the challenges created by under-resourced social worker teams noting in particular insufficient processes of induction, mentoring, and training of core staff and inefficient management of the caseloads so the work was unequally allocated or structured amongst available staff. This in turn led to social workers feeling they were being de-skilled due

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[22] Irish Foster Care Association [a non-statutory organisation, who are the NGO based representative body for foster care in Ireland.] IFCA's membership is comprised of foster and relative carers, social workers, social care workers, childcare workers, academics and others with an interest in foster care.

to the high levels of administrative work. This briefing accurately reflects literature research in this area, in particular by Brady and Gilligan (2018, p.35)

> In their review of the qualitative literature on school outcomes and barriers to educational progress, Ferguson and Wolkow (2012: 1146) note that some of the key barriers faced by children in care in relation to their education include 'interagency antagonism' and 'school placement instability, and poor information management (p.35)

Recommendations included appropriate training and efficient management systems to be deployed (p.22). However, they do acknowledge that most solutions are resource-dependent and need the input of the other stakeholders, like foster carers and children in care, and other professionals to optimise solutions (*Tusla* and IFSC 2016, p.33). However, on a positive note *Tusla* (2015) in their most recent adequacy report noted that 'inspection reports published by HIQA reflected the fact that once services engaged with children and families, they received good quality services' (p.12).

Worries have been expressed in the UK, as well as in Ireland, regarding the extremely high thresholds operated in children's services, the consequences of which result in many referred high-need families being assessed but not necessarily receiving a service. Laming (2009) asserts that thresholds are an attempt to limit access to services because of financial constraints, that they have no statutory basis, and also reports concerns from a wide range of service providers that thresholds, acting as a gateway to restrict services for children, are inconsistent and too high (p.30).

2.8.2 Information silos and lack of a national database.

Tusla and IFCA (2016) in their briefing paper stated that expertise, skills and specialist knowledge were in silos within particular regions or teams (p.33). Brady and Dolan (2007) reflected on good practice in child services agencies ten years ago and referred to the preponderance of information silos in the Irish child services sector.

> To use an analogy from the medical world - if somebody had developed a cure for a disease, it would be considered a crime for it not to be shared – yet, within an Irish context at least a mechanism for practitioner

sharing does not exist in child and family services.(Brady and Dolan 2007, p.23)

Much of the data which is available in Ireland is often for different regions of the country rather than from a national database. This matter was commented upon by *The Report of the Commission to Inquiry into Child Abuse Implementation Plan (2009)*, which noted that data is often collected for local management purposes rather than for ascertaining a nationwide perspective of critical matters in child care. The above snapshot detailing more focused statistics have remedied the situation somewhat and may be useful in the planning of future child care services in education. However, there remains a dearth of information on areas of foster care service delivery, such as profiles of foster carers providing placements to children. Also, much of the data available is general rather than specifically referring to the overall figures for children in care, making it difficult to track specific patterns about foster carers and children in foster care. Hence, the foster children may not be identified for educational and other supports necessary for them to close the attainment gap in their education.

> As a result of the lack of relevant data, it is not possible to generate an adequate profile of, among other things, attendance, participation, and attainment rates in education among children in care or to compare them with the general population of children (Darmody, McMahon and Banks, 2013, p.6)

Nonetheless, Irish research on children in care appears to echo international trends generally, particularly on the length of time many young people spend in care. Indeed, Irish research underlines that there is a tendency for some young people to 'drift' in care (See Moran *et al.* 2016a pp.22–24). Regarding placement type, similar to international developments in child welfare policy and practice, there has been a decisive shift away from institutional, residential-type care towards foster care arrangements in Ireland (Munro and Gilligan 2013; Clarke and Eustace 2010). Ireland now has one of highest rates of family-based care placements globally (Munro and Gilligan 2013).

2.8.3 Eligible Educational Supports for foster children.

The Educational Welfare Service has seen a steady increase in their waiting times indicating an expanding service gap in this area to 1,513 children in care on the waiting

list. (Figure 18) This reflects both the need for educational supports and also the value placed on education from social workers and thus is a reflection of *Tusla*'s agenda in putting education as a priority in their care plan. 'A central tenet of the aftercare plan is education, training and employment, as well as accommodation and family access and health and well being' (*Tusla National Policy for Aftercare 2017*, p.16)

Educational Welfare Services

	Sep-17	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18
# Referrals on waiting list	960	900	819	998	1,083	1,205	1,513
# Referrals screened	218	372	491	372	638	784	726
# Open cases mth end	3,110	3,080	3,097	3,121	3,175	3,255	3,439
# Cases closed	300	348	313	195	360	384	247
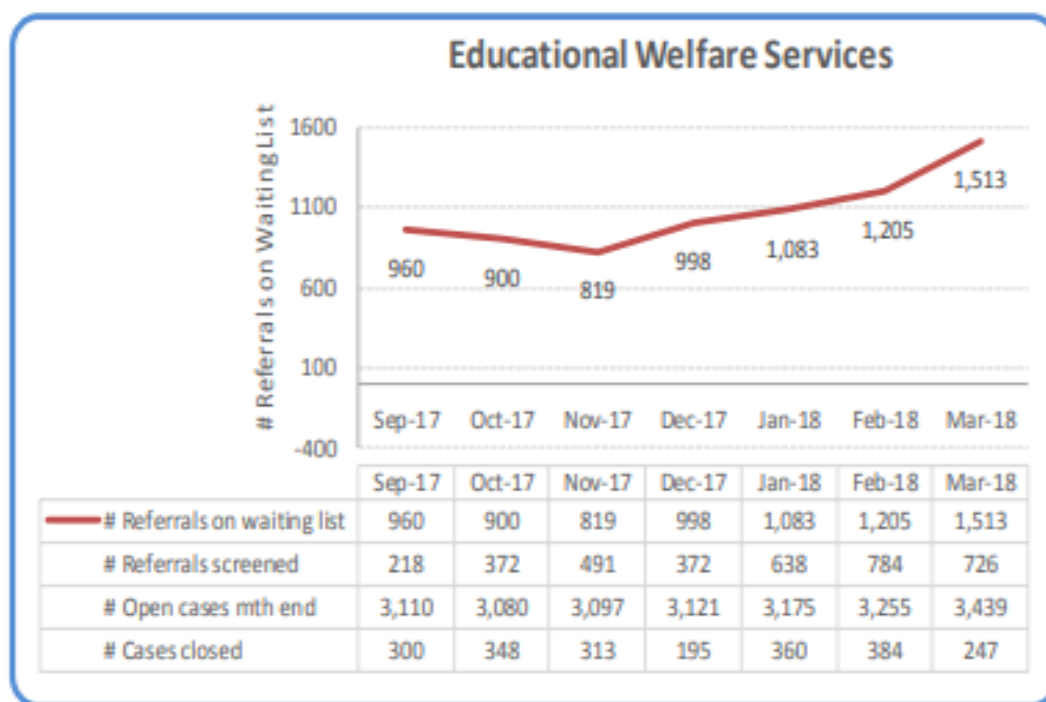
Figure 18: Waiting List Referrals Educational Welfare Services

Source: National Performance and Activity Dashboard March 2018 (*Tusla* 2018)

Brady and Gilligan (2018, p.33) also noted the identification of education as a central platform: 'the educational needs of children and young people in foster care are given high priority' (p.33) and 'the effective participation and achievement in education of all children in care' as one of its 'strategic objectives' for 2015-2017 according to *Tusla* (2014, p.23).

Most young people who have had a care history with *Tusla* are entitled to an aftercare service based on their assessed needs. The core eligible age range for aftercare is from 18 years up to 21 years. This can be extended until the completion of a course of education in which a young person is engaged, up to the age of 23 years. The Child Care

(Amendment) Act 2015 strengthens the legislative provisions regarding aftercare, imposing a statutory duty on *Tusla* to prepare an aftercare plan for an eligible child or eligible young person. (JCCYA 2017, p.22). When combined with the introduction of a Standardised National Aftercare Allowance for young people leaving care engaged in education/training; these proposals are a first step in a phased development of aftercare services providing certainty and consistency for care leavers for the first time. (JCCYA 2017, p.24) It also acts as an opt in service. *Tusla,* in their *National Policy for Aftercare* (2017, p.16*)* commented that,

> it is not without conditions as explained in the National Aftercare Policy for alternative care 2017 : 'The Child Care Amendment Act 2015' places a statutory duty on *Tusla* to form a view in relation to each person leaving care as to whether there is a "need for assistance" and if it forms such a view to provide services in accordance with the section and subject to resources (*Tusla* 2017, p.16).

However, issues remain and Daly (2012) has argued that the 'need' inclusion, which remained from the previous Child Care Act 1991, allows a fragmented service

> 'The absence of any legal entitlement to aftercare supports for care leavers has had important implications for the way in which aftercare services have developed. The current provision of aftercare supports have developed in an ad hoc way with the result being that the level of supports varies across the country, with some areas having no service available for young people' (Daly 2012, p.7).

Brady and Dolan (2007) reviewed the development of child and family services in Ireland which 'have undergone rapid development since the implementation of the Child Care Act 1991, and child and family provision is now a blend of new and established approaches and models delivered in a range of settings' (p.2). *Tusla* has a number of child care supports in general, like *Meitheal,* an early intervention service, National Child Protection System (CPNS), Emergency Out-of-Hours Social Work Service (EOH), National Children's Residential Service. There are also numerous supports that come under the umbrella of the Educational Welfare Service (EWS). The EWS is part of *Tusla* and is responsible for the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme, which is a

core element of the integrated EWS serving DEIS schools and the School Completion Service (SCS) (*Tusla*, 2018)[23].

> SCP is a targeted initiative which identifies young people most at risk of early school leaving, therefore projects must prioritise resources at students most at risk of early school leaving, particularly in a climate of reducing resources (Loftus 2017, p.3).

Smyth *et al.* (2015, pp.2-3) explain the scale of these programmes stating that

> 'the SCP operates in 470 primary schools and 224 post-primary schools. There are 124 local SCP projects employing 248 full-time, 627 part-time and 2,211 sessional and other staff. Each of the 124 local SCP projects is led by a management committee comprising school principals, HSCL co-ordinators, parents and voluntary and statutory agencies. Their aims are to supportt children with educational difficulties which have been identified because of poor attendance, participation and retention. The initiatives include breakfast clubs, homework clubs, afterschool supports, mentoring programmes, and therapeutic interventions' (Smyth *et al.* pp.2-3).

The main route through which schools are provided with additional supports is through the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools programme. (Loftus 2017, p.5). All DEIS Urban Primary and DEIS Post-Primary schools are currently included in the HSCL Scheme, which serves 528 schools. According to *Tusla,* (2018)[24], the 400 full-time HSCL Coordinators are teachers in these schools, assigned to HSCL, to work primarily with the adults in the child's life, in order to empower them, so that they can better support their children to attend school, participate in education and develop positive attitudes to life-long learning. Central to the HSCL initiative, is the identification of needs and the provision of a tailored and proportionate response to those needs, through a range of interventions, which are evidence-based, focused and structured.

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[23] All DEIS Urban Primary and DEIS Post-Primary schools are currently included in the HSCL Scheme, which serves 528 schools. The 400 full-time HSCL Coordinators are teachers in these schools, assigned to HSCL, to work primarily with the salient adults in the child's life, in order to empower them, so that they can better support their children to attend school, participate in education and develop positive attitudes to life-long learning. Central to the HSCL initiative, is the identification of needs and the provision of a tailored and proportionate response to those needs, through a range of interventions, which are evidence-based, focused and structured. Both of these programmes are part of an Action Plan for Educational Inclusion. This aims to combat educational disadvantage, through a range of interventions and strategies, designed to improve educational outcomes for children. https://www.tusla.ie/services/educational-welfare-services/school-support-services-under-the-deis-initiative/home-school-community-liaison-scheme/ accessed May 2018.

[24] ibid

Smyth *et al.* (2015, p.x) states that 'research indicates that a significant proportion of children and young people from semi/unskilled and non-employed backgrounds attend non-DEIS schools'. It is a 'bottom up' approach with the range of supports depending on local needs while 'the identification of schools for inclusion in the DEIS programme for example is based not on an analysis of disadvantage at student level, but on reports submitted by school principals on the level of disadvantage in their school population' (Loftus 2017, p.9), indicating subjectivity, not transparency. However, the policies at national level may appear disjointed. According to Brady and Gilligan (2018, p.34),

> For example, within national strategies on educational disadvantage and access (such as, The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019 (Department of Education, 2015) there is no specific mention of children in care, in spite of their being in the care of the State and being identified internationally as having poorer educational outcomes than their majority population peers.(p.34)

Smyth *et al.* (2015, p.24) note that providing services to these young people is labour-intensive and requires substantial time investment. One-to-one support or small group work will often be required. This raises the question of effective operation within the rising demand for services, and the skills shortage and financial constraints outlined.

2.8.4. Support for foster carers

In the UK, Fisher *et al.* (2000) undertook a study to explore foster carers views on the qualities that they sought from social workers in supporting them to undertake their role. The findings indicated that the key factors that foster carers found supportive were, notably, the physical and emotional availability of social workers, as well as team-work and respect, and help of both a practical nature with the individual child. However, in terms of training and supervision, the main factor was the handling of disagreements between carers and social workers. This would indicate that social workers are well placed to provide support to foster carers, but some further thinking needs to be done around the relational aspects of the two roles and the expectations from each to the other.

McDonald, Burgess and Smith (2003) and Golding (2004) explored different ways to support foster carers to support the needs of foster children. The consultation was

therefore used to support foster carers to increase their skills to help them to manage, and to further understand their foster child. McDonald *et al.* (2003) conclude that having a multi-disciplinary support team in place can have a positive impact upon the psychological well-being of foster carers, their child-management skills and upon the children themselves. This builds upon the findings of Minnis and Devine (2001) and Pithouse *et al.* (2002).

In its *State of the Nation's Foster Care 2016* report, the Fostering Network in the UK collated the views of foster carers through a State of the Nation survey, which it conducts every two years to find out what key issues need to be addressed. The survey sought the views of 2,530 UK foster carers and found that 'more than half of all foster carers were having to supplement the cost of looking after the child' (Fostering Network 2016, p.17) Barnados, in its 2016 annual report, highlights the Irish parallel, noting that two in five parents forgo paying household bills or cut back on expenses to meet school costs. Only a quarter of foster carers had described respite support as excellent or good. 31% of foster carers reported that they were rarely or never given all of the information about a fostered child prior to placement. Just under half of foster carers did not have an agreed training plan for the next year and a third of foster carers felt that children's social workers did not treat them as an equal member of the team. Tusla and IFCA wrote a national consultation briefing paper published in 2017 which explored the relationships between foster carers and social workers. They found that where there were signs of mutual respect, there was a service gap in communication between the parties, and more pointedly, 37% of foster parents felt that their contribution was not respected by social workers. This indicates a lack of inclusion, accorded to foster parents in their stakeholder ship. Figure 19 summarises the main indirect influences that operate in the exosystem that impact upon those direct stakeholders who are responsible for a foster child's educational attainment.

The circle contains the following text:

Exosystem indirect Influence... (curved along top left)

Labels around the oval: Political, Educational, Government, Religious, Resources, Funding, Support Networks, Qualifications, Professional Development, Community, Economic System

Educational supports accelerated since Child care Act 1991.

• Rise in demand for educational supports by foster Children.

• Educational Supports exist (SCP, HSCL, JCSP) mainly through DEIS but foster children may be 'invisible' in the school context. Unequal delivery of service due to a 'bottom up' approach (Smyth *et al.* 2015; Brady and Gilligan 2018)

• Inefficient management of Resources in Tusla has led to information silos and staff attrition.

• After care service based on 'need' may lead to a fragmented service.

• In the UK, Fisher, Gibbs, *et al.* (2000) recommend policies to improve relationships between foster parents and social workers.

• No national database or specific statistics on exiting the foster process. Scarcity of statistics (Darmody *et al.* 2013).

• Little research on educational outcomes of children in care (Jackson McParlan 2006)

• Poor relationship between foster parents and social workers have hindered the access of educational supports for foster children.
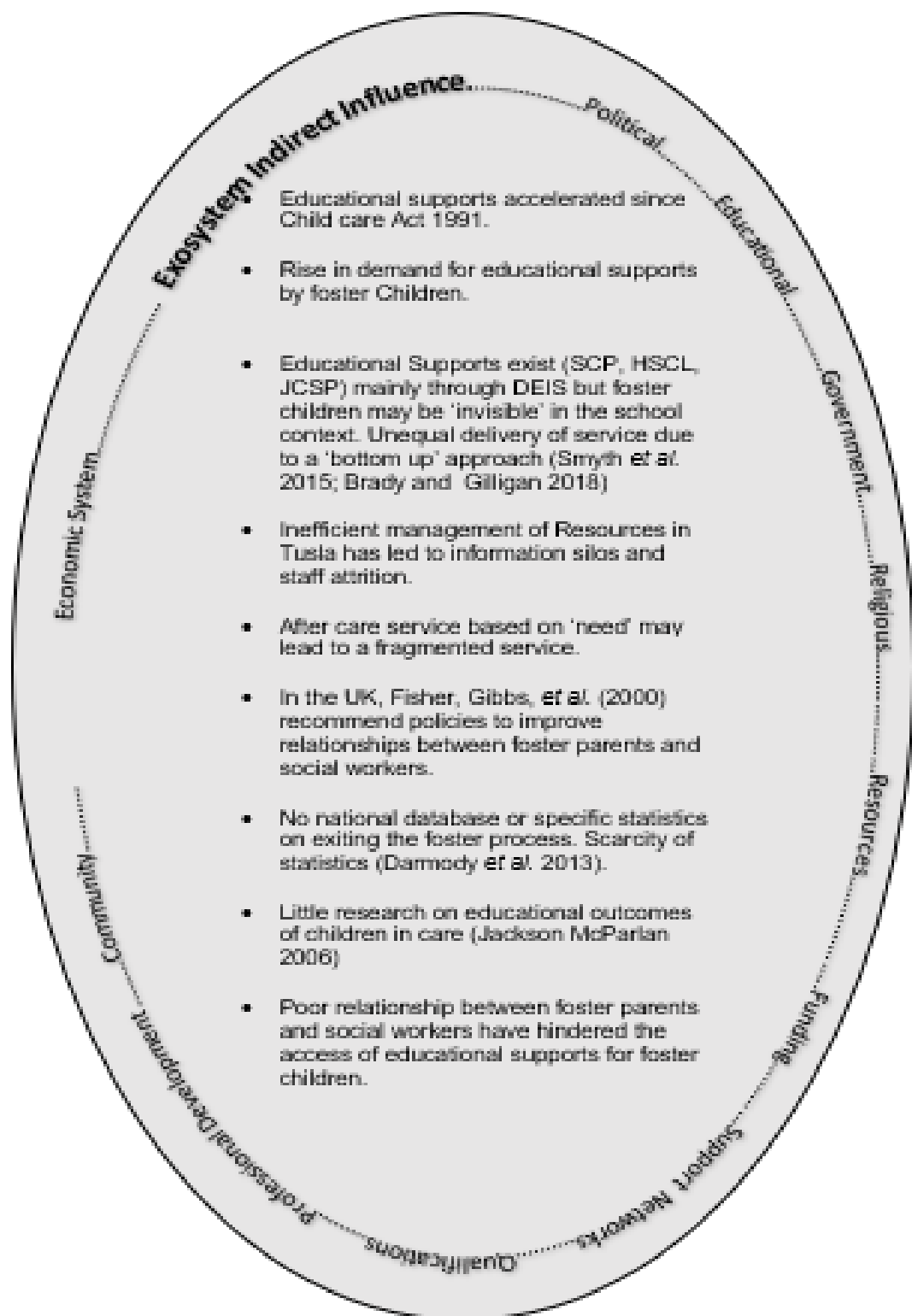
Figure 19: Exosystem of the Foster Child

2.9. Chronosystem of a Foster Child.

Bronfenbrenner also described a macrosystem (the prevailing cultural and economic conditions of the society) and a chronosystem (reminding the reader that this system of nested relationships is situated in time and shifts accordingly); Examples of chronosystem influences outlined here are the development of legislation around child care and child care services in Ireland and the increased focus on the educational outcomes of foster children.

2.9.1 A paradigm shift in how children are treated in legislation.

The new statutory requirements became operational on 11 December 2017 when the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs commenced the remaining provisions of the Children First Act 2015. The Children First Act 2015 provides for a number of key child protection measures that are relevant to schools and registered teachers including: a statutory obligation on schools to keep children safe from harm and to produce a Child Safeguarding Statement; a statutory obligation on registered teachers to report child protection concerns at or above a defined threshold to *Tusla*; and a statutory obligation on mandated persons to assist *Tusla* in the assessment of a child protection risk, if requested to do so by *Tusla* (Department of Education and Skills 2018)

The second paradigm shift was in the development of equality legislation which embraced the rights of the children themselves in participation and consultation. Participation and the promotion of children's rights has become an emerging practice in the alternative care system which is evidenced by the introduction of the The Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations 1995 and the Child Care (Placement of Children with Relatives) Regulations 1995, which demonstrate evidence of promoting children's rights in various regulations laid out to guide and shape good foster care practice. For example, Section 11(2) of the Regulations, states that in the drawing up of a care plan for

the foster child, the foster child should be included and consulted (Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster) Regulations 1995, Part IV, Article 18).

Thirdly, the adoption of European directives and recommendations in child welfare policies. Ultimately, a shift towards a children's rights approach to policy and practice has also been influenced by European directives and recommendations (Hayes 2002). Goodyear (2011, p.46) further warned that, without the application of new perspectives, such as rights-based frameworks and sociological concepts of childhood, the foster care system will fail to address the flaws in its own service delivery model.

Participatory rights are essential for foster children, since they may lack other sources of advocacy. As suggested above, taking practical steps to gather the respective views of the foster carers and foster children, as well as that of professionals, may provide a more thorough assessment of individual cases and ensure that the Irish foster care system meets the developmental and rights-based needs of all key stakeholders, while ultimately facilitating the educational development of the child in care.

This analysis of the legal frameworks underpinning the notion of childhood and the foster care system provides an essential insight into how childhood is viewed and policies determined. It also provides an overview of the `evolving debates, which have taken place, and continue to take place, in relation to the fundamental theoretical principles underpinning the foster care system in Irish society. These three paradigm shifts in policy should nominally facilitate the best outcomes for children in care including their educational development.

Furthermore, while policy and practice developments have led to greater recognition of the importance of respecting the rights of children in foster care and developing policies and practices in consulting with them, questions might be raised as to whether these rights and opportunities have been facilitated. For example, Section 45 of the Child Care Act 1991 represented the first key piece of Irish legislation on aftercare services. However, it fell short of placing a statutory obligation on the HSE to provide an aftercare service to all young people leaving care in Ireland. (Daly 2012, p.6) Instead, the provision of aftercare is at the discretion of the HSE.

The Child Care (Amendment) Act 2015 strengthened the legislative provisions regarding aftercare, imposing a statutory duty on *Tusla* to prepare an aftercare plan for an eligible child or eligible young person. The aim is to create an explicit, as opposed to implicit, statement of *Tusla*'s duty to satisfy itself as to the child's or young person's need for assistance by preparing a plan that identifies those needs for aftercare supports. (Department of Children and Youth affairs website). This is an opt-in service, and it acts until the child reaches the age of 23. It is promising that a central tenet of the aftercare plan is education, training and employment, as well as accommodation, family access, and health and well-being. However it is not without conditions, as explained in the *National Aftercare Policy for alternative care 2017*,

> The Child Care Amendment Act 2015' places a statutory duty on *Tusla* to form a view in relation to each person leaving care as to whether there is a 'need for assistance' and if it forms such a view to provide services in accordance with the section and subject to resources.

The evolving legislation in Ireland, when it comes to protection of foster children, is motivated by international aspects of 'best practice' when it comes to child care provision, and cultural and social influences, such as equality legislation, and court cases where the Irish constitution has failed in their responsibility in taking care of children. (*McGuiness Report* 1993). Hence, Irish legislation is moving gradually from the reactive welfare model of child policy to a pro-active, rights-based model as argued for by Hayes back in 2002.

Figure 20 completes the final ecology examined under Brofenbrenner's conceptual framework considering the changes over time in relation to perceptions , availability of supports, and legal precedents which impact on the foster child's environment.

2.10 Chapter Summary.

This research has framed the literature review using Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model. It was expansive, yet focused. It acknowledged the systems and ecologies, and the inter-relationships between the various stakeholders without ever losing sight of the ultimate goal, that of the foster child's educational attainment and development, which is the core research question in this study. The next chapter concentrates on the

methodology used to drill down the primary research to explore the research from the perspective of school principals, teachers, and social workers who are tasked with the educational remit of foster children.

Chronosystem

Paradigm change in Legislation.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

Full adoption of the Childcare Act 1991 (*McGuinness Report* 1993)

Equality Legislation promoting children's rights

Children's First Act 2015 actively seeking children's agency in their own outcomes.

Statutory responsibility for after care supports for children in care where 'needed...Ambiguous.

Increasing Educational Supports.

Acknowledgement by care provision services of the benefits of education to long term success of foster children in mental health, education, and well-being.

Ireland: Church and State - no separation between the two. Church historically dominant in Irish belief system. Trust relationship

Policy of handing over responsibility to Church for child welfare led to reactionary ad hoc legislation driven by social pressures, scandals and political will.

Trust fractured which led to complete absence of church as any moral authority

Distrust with state agencies leads to a siege mentality and this pervades through all institutions, reinforcing a defensive culture that is resistant to dialogue and transparency. (*Shannon Report* 2017.)
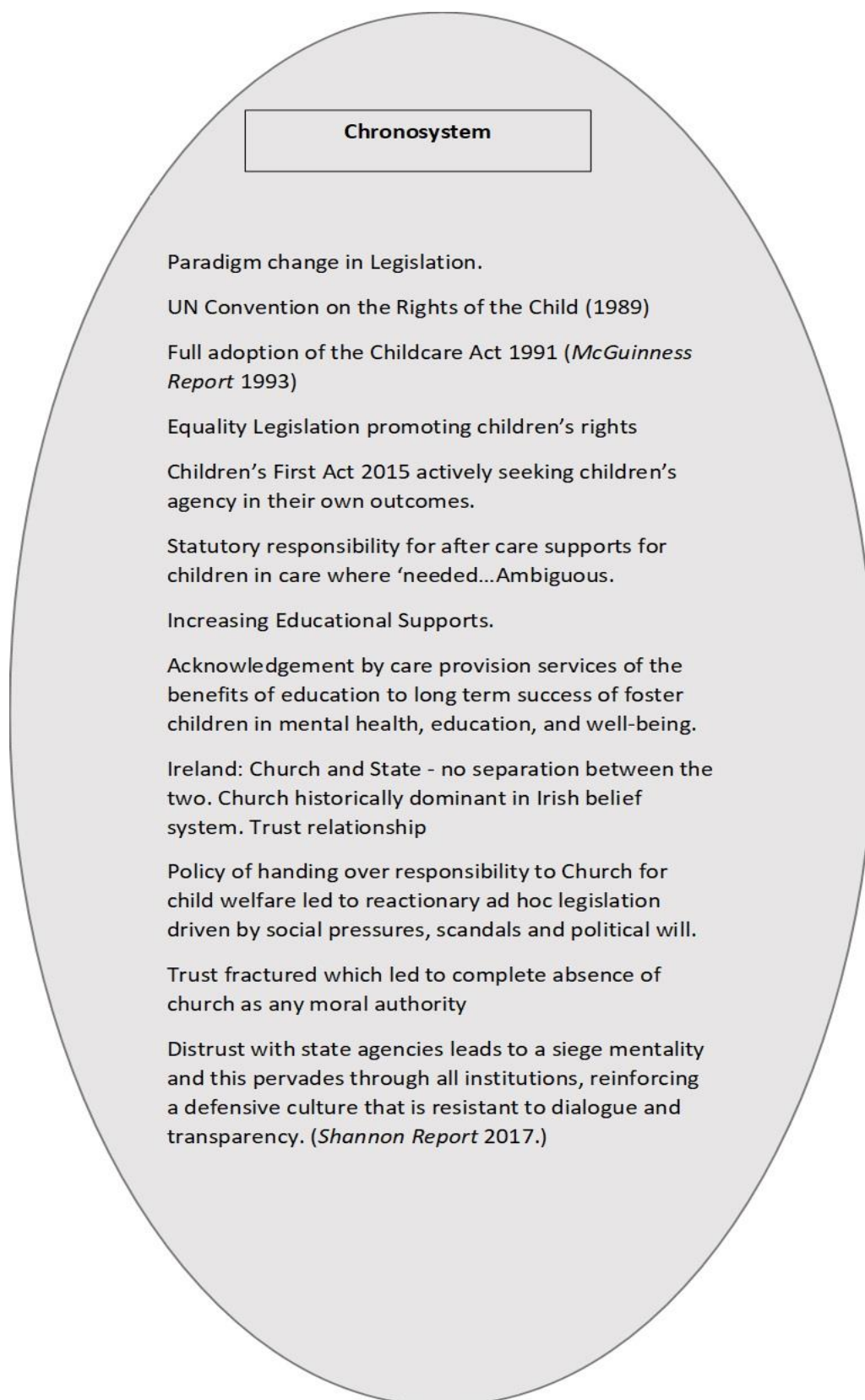
Figure 20: Chronosystem of a foster child

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction.

The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences and challenges of the stakeholders in fulfilling the foster child's educational remit in Ireland. This chapter will discuss the aspects that shaped and guided the methodological choices of this research, the formulation of the research questions, the choice of research methods and methodology, the analysis of the data, and will also presentation and discuss the findings. I will address the theoretical, conceptual and practical approaches that informed the research design as 'inquirers often overlook this phase, so it is helpful to have it highlighted and positioned first in the levels of the research process.'(Creswell 2013, p.18).

The framework suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1994) is followed in this study. It involves three fundamental questions which should be addressed by researchers during the design phase of their research. These questions concern the ontological understanding of the researcher (the nature of reality), their epistemological stance (how we know what we know), and the methodological approach (appropriate lens and strategies for acquiring knowledge).

This chapter is divided into 7 distinct sections. Beginning with a contribution to knowledge section, which frames the discussion, the chapter then moves on to declare the author's ontology and epistemology. This research paradigm is explored as a viable approach for an investigation into the experiences of teachers and other educational stakeholders.

The next section argues for the choice of method, which was predominantly qualitative using concurrent semi-structured interviews. These methods will be examined in depth and how they complement the scope of the research.

The third section concentrates on the fundamental, theoretical approaches that underpin the research project, namely the phenomenological perspective, utilising a social constructivist paradigm.

Section four concentrates on a discussion of interviewing as a method and an evaluation of the sampling strategy pursued. The following section 5 addresses robustly how this author has taken steps to ensure the validity of the findings. This is critical in establishing the 'value' of the data collected, hence issues around bias, benchmarking, and reflexivity are highlighted. I provide a detailed explanation of how the data was validated through all stages of the research process. Data interpretation is a highly subjective task, particularly in a social constructionist paradigm, so I engage in a detailed discussion about how I validated the accuracy of the findings.

The penultimate section focusses on the data collection techniques, decisions on both sampling and the coding framework utilised, a thematic approach to coding the data incorporating a six-step model designed by Braun and Clarke (2006).

The final section concludes with the ethical considerations and the limitations of the project.

3.1.1 Contribution to Knowledge

This study seeks to explore the educational trajectory of foster children through the lens of teachers and other educational stakeholders who are charged with the educational remit of foster children. This chapter outlines the theoretical perspectives that underpin the study and the research design employed which provides the structure for this exploration.

To pursue the objectives of the research, this thesis is located within what would be termed the phenomenological paradigm using a qualitative methodology. The research methodology is situated within a social constructionist paradigm and is primarily based on research conducted via a series of concurrent, semi-structured interviewing with school principals, teachers, social workers, and policymakers between 2015–2018.

The impact and contribution to knowledge can be summarised in three points:
1.   This exploratory study addressed the multiple influences on both foster children and key stakeholders responsible for their education; teachers, school principals, and social workers. International and domestic research in this area was discussed, noting

the impact on the educational development of the foster child in various international jurisdictions, which may suggest 'best practice' for the Irish context.

2. This study identified the experiences of different stakeholders in dealing with foster children in Ireland. Gaps and obstacles were identified which impact on the educational development of the foster child. It also explored the unintended consequences on both the effectiveness of teachers, school principals, and social workers as well as the impact on the foster child's educational attainment.

3. The research also explored through the experiences of the various stakeholders whether any identifiable systematic barriers preclude the educational stakeholders' (school principals, teachers, and social workers) effectiveness in pursuing their charged remit in facilitating the education of foster children.

This thesis aims to gain a deep understanding of a specific phenomenon, in this case, the experiences of various stakeholders that influence the foster child development in the school setting. Hence, while the context and remit is school education, the perspectives from the various stakeholders' experiences is relevant, and necessary, since they all influence the child's engagement in their educational journey

This fits the aims of qualitative research, which is 'to gain an understanding of the nature and form of phenomena, to unpack meanings, to develop explanations, or to generate ideas, concepts and theories' (Ritchie *et al.* 2003, p.82). Ashworth (2003), as cited in Ridley (2004, p.93) states that qualitative research aims 'to elucidate the meaning of a situation or entity regarding how it is perceived by the individual person'. This again matches the objectives of the current research.

I concentrated the primary research on post-primary participants and social workers within the Dublin region where 50% of foster children are located. (*Tusla*, 2018) Whereas I am seeking common findings that may inform policy, I acknowledge the minor limitation of such a homogenous setting which may preclude the generalizability of the research.

The findings emerging from these research strands illuminated the challenges and issues that face educational stakeholders in dealing with foster children, with the findings taken on board by interested parties and stakeholders in positions of influence, or holding

executive power, as a matter of urgency. The impact will be profound and ultimately as Briggs and Coleman (2007,p.7) state: 'at the very least research will impact on the professional development of the individual…it may even underpin a major change in the ethos that affects the whole institution'.

3.1.2 Location within the Research Paradigm.

Ontology describes the nature of reality and it has been suggested that in educational research 'ontological assumptions (assumptions about the nature of reality and the nature of things) give rise to epistemological assumptions (ways of researching and enquiring into the nature of reality and the nature of things)' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011, p.3) Hence, 'different researchers embrace different realities, as do the individuals being studied, and the readers of qualitative study.'(Creswell 2013,p.20). My ontological perspective is constructivist, as stated by Bryman (2001, p.16) that 'there is no one reality but a constant flow of revision'. This mirrors the reality of the teacher's role in that it is dynamic, uncertain and in part socially constructed.

Social constructionism is a broad paradigm which highlights how subjective meaning is both varied and multiple, therefore it is 'formed through interaction with others (hence social construction), and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individual lives' (Creswell 2013, p.25) Working in this phenomenological milieu, this researcher aimed to explore words and actions in narrative, or descriptive ways, examine people's stories, capture the particulars of their lives, 'more closely representing the situation as experienced by participants themselves.'(Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p.2).

Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007) specify that ontological assumptions give rise to epistemological assumptions. These in turn affect methodological considerations and issues of instrumentation, data collection and research. The research process for qualitative researchers is emergent. This means that the initial plan for the research cannot be tightly prescribed, and all phases of the process may change after the researcher enters the field and begins to collect data (Creswell 2009, pp.175-176).

> Qualitative research, in particular, is rarely linear, with each phase seen
> as a discrete entity. Researchers tend to work in a circular way, devising

and rephrasing their research questions as they engage critically with existing theories. (Hogan *et al*. 2009, p.1)

According to Hogan *et al.* (2009) 'generally speaking, research questions focused on how certain processes, events, or structures are interrelated tend to suit qualitative methods' (p.2). Also

> When researchers conduct qualitative research, they are embracing the idea of multiple realities. Different researchers embrace different realities, as do the individuals being studied and the readers of a qualitative study. When studying individuals, qualitative researchers conduct a study with the intent of reporting multiple realities. Evidence of multiple realities includes the use of multiple forms of evidence in themes using actual words of different individuals and presenting different perspectives. For example, when writers compile a phenomenology, they report how individuals participating in the study view their experiences differently. (Creswell 2013, p.20)

Mason (2002) argues that qualitative research is characteristically exploratory, fluid and flexible, data-driven and context-sensitive, so that it is not usual to have an advance blueprint. According to Miles and Huberman (1994) there are a number of core recurring features for qualitative studies that seem to support this kind of exploration

> The researcher's role is to gain a 'holistic' (systemic, encompassing, integrated) overview of the context under study' and 'attempts to capture data on the perceptions of local actors 'from the inside', through a process of deep attentiveness, of empathetic understanding and of suspending or 'bracketing' preconceptions about the topics under discussion', while the main task is to 'explicate the ways people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situations' whereby the researcher is the main measurement device. (Miles and Huberman 1994, pp.6-7)

Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to interpret phenomena regarding the meanings people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln 1998). Interpretative researchers begin with individuals and set out to understand their interpretations of the world around them.

qualitative methods can by themselves produce compelling knowledge of how and why people behave as they do, whether in organisational, family, personal, or other social roles.(Hogan *et al.* 2009, p.3)

In order to explore the experiences of the various educational stakeholders in their interactions with foster children, all of these factors seem to be compatible. Interpretative researchers begin with individuals and set out to understand their interpretations of the world around them. In the field of foster children with multiple stakeholders, and multiple realities, I chose a qualitative study to explore the direct and lateral connections that exist, and are framed using Bronfenbrenner's framework. Although qualitative research has 'no theory or paradigm that is distinctly its own', being instead 'multi-paradigmatic', as 'a situated activity that locates the observer in the world' (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p.7), it is interpretive. As a qualitative researcher shaped by a constructivist-interpretivist framework, I sought to explore an issue (foster children educational attainment as perceived by teachers, school principals, and social workers) and 'to understand the contexts and settings in which the participants in the study address this issue' (Creswell 2007, p.40).

3.1.3 Role of the Researcher.

The conceptual framework of the research study according to Miles and Huberman (1994) is fundamental to the research study, as 'researcher assumptions expectations and beliefs that supports and informs the study is a key part of the design'.

The qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behaviour, and interviewing participants. They may use an instrument, but it is one designed by the researcher using open-ended questions. They do not tend to use or rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers.

> Researchers "position themselves" in a qualitative research study. This means that researchers convey (i.e. in a method section, in an introduction, or in other places in a study) their background (e.g. work experiences, cultural experiences, history), how it informs their interpretation of the information in a study, and what they have to gain from the study. As Wolcott (2010:36) said that 'our readers have a right to know about us. Moreover, they do not want to know whether we

played in the high school band. They want to know what prompts our interest in the topics we investigate, to whom we are reporting, and what we personally stand to gain from our study.(Creswell 2012, p.47)

This researcher believes that reality is multiple and can be seen from many viewpoints and my ontology endorses this view of reality. Ontological experiences influence the way a person perceives reality. The author has been a foster parent with ten years' experience in dealing with multiple stakeholders and has a principle that education is the only true liberator that drives opportunity, and limits disadvantage.

This has no doubt shaped my beliefs (ontology) and epistemological approach to research this topic. Striving to achieve school engagement in my foster children has both shaped my ontological experiences, and influenced my philosophical assumptions 'when studying individuals, qualitative researchers conduct a study with the intent of reporting these multiple realities.'(Creswell 2013, p.20). This approach argues for the value of subjective knowledge generated by the research participants about their experiences in the learning trajectory of foster children.

The aims therefore are 'not to provide self-evidential proof of universally perceived objective realities, instead of the more epistemologically modest concepts of perspective and argument' (Mason 2002, p.16). It also recognises and acknowledges the role that the author, as a researcher, plays in the research process as 'the personal-self becomes inseparable from the researcher-self.'(Creswell 2003, p.182).

3.1.4 Bracketing

This awareness is tempered by an undertaking that this author has consciously sought to 'bracket' his experiences during the research and is cognisant that

> transcendental or psychological phenomenology is focused less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of participants.(Moustakas 1994 quoted in Creswell 2006, pp.59-60).

The process of bracketing is used in phenomenological research to view a phenomena through a critical lens so as not to interject personal experiences or preconceptions into a

study (Denzin 1989). Bracketing is however, one of the most misunderstood and controversial aspects of the phenomenological method (Langdridge 2008, p.1129), and has been criticised by existential phenomenologists such as Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, who argue that while we may wish to bracket off aspects of our way of seeing the world, we cannot put aside all of our experiences and understanding and see phenomena 'as if for the first time' (Langdridge 2008, p.1129). Mindful of this critique, Langdridge (2008, p.1129) asserts that bracketing is nonetheless a valid and an important process to employ in phenomenological research inquiries. Thus, as far as reasonably possible, this author has 'bracketed' out his views before proceeding with the experiences of others. However, it is only possible to observe from within one's own historical location; human inquiry is inevitably interpretive and inherently subjective. Subjectivity is not bias. (Greene 2007, p.40).

3.2 Description of Various Methodologies.

3.2.1 Why not Positivism?

In its simplest form positivist research is governed by quantitative mathematical principles and will deliver the 'what' within a research question, while the post-positivist research methodologies within qualitative research will deliver the 'how and why' of the research question. (Miles and Huberman, 1994)

The positivist (paradigm) approach is evidenced by explanation, prediction and proof. Its worldview was simple; it was hierarchical, mechanical, epitomised linear causality, and was objective. Maykut and Morhouse (1994) assert that an 'insistence on explanation, prediction and proof are the hallmarks of positivism.' Quantitative approaches are based on three fundamental assumptions. Firstly, they assume that regularities or patterns in nature exist and that these patterns can be observed and described. Secondly, dividing them into parts and studying those parts using empirical methods can test statements based on these regularities. Thirdly, they assume that it is possible to distinguish between value-laden statements and factual ones (Moses and Knutsen 2007).

Critics of this approach strenuously challenge most or all of these assumptions. They believe that there are very few absolute 'facts' in social science and contend that, even if

the world exists independently of the observer, our knowledge of it does not. Hence, qualitative research methods followed and sought to replace scientific objectivity and hypotheses with an examination of words and actions in narrative or descriptive ways.

3.2.2 Towards a qualitative design.

This research is situated within a praxis research paradigm and is more of a holistic approach to problem-solving, focusing on principals' and teachers' perceptions of how they facilitate the education of foster children. It is subjective and personal, aiming to understand 'the subjective world of human experience' (Cohen *et al.* 2007, p.21).

'Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them'. (Denzin & Lincoln 2011, p.3) Also, this type of inquiry according to Bowen (2008, p.138) is characterised *inter alia* by 'research in natural settings', 'purposive sampling', 'the tentative application of findings' and 'special criteria of trustworthiness'. Qualitative research embraces the idea of 'multiple realities' (Creswell 2007, p.16). Campbell (1997) defines qualitative research as

> An inquiry process based on building a holistic, complex understanding of a social problem. It is characterized by data collection in a natural setting where the researcher acts as a key instrument. Furthermore, the research contains deep, rich description and is more concerned with process than specifying outcomes or products. (p.122)

Although some of the traditional approaches to qualitative research, such as the 'interpretive, naturalistic approach' and 'meanings' are evident in this definition, the definition also has a strong orientation toward the impact of qualitative research and its ability to transform the world. (Creswell 2012, p.44)

Critics of this approach refer to areas of subjectivity, difficulty in replication (especially in ethnography). Problems of generalisation, and the lack of transparency, are referred to by Bryman as significant limitations in a critique of qualitative research (Bryman 2001, pp.282-283). Guba and Lincoln (2005, pp.207-208) contend that naturalist inquirers eschew objectivity believing it to be 'a chimera, a mythical creature that never existed,

save in the imaginations of those who believe that knowing can be separated from the knower'. On the other hand, Bottery *et al.* (2008a, p.183) would argue that 'what is most meaningful is sometimes derived from the singular and unique; that generalisations in education are as likely to be useful if they are 'fuzzy' generalisations as if they are from scientific or statistical generalisations'.

A flexible paradigm was considered the most appropriate method of enquiry incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research elements, to allow some flexibility as the qualitative collection continues. This is especially useful in semi-structured interviews, as emerging themes in early interviews can be added to a guide question list for later interviews. Robson writes that a study can develop as it is conducted, allowing the data to evolve and 'unfold as the research proceeds'.

The study, as discussed, is rooted in a post-positivist, qualitative paradigm on knowledge work considering what Geertz (1973) describes as 'thick descriptions'. The study fits into the exploratory paradigm as there is little research on the educational trajectory of foster children through the lens of the teachers and those directly involved (the microsystem).

3.3 Theoretical Paradigm Employed

This chapter shall explain the theories that underpin this research study. Two complementary theories are utilised, an adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of human development, as explained in Chapter 2, and the socially constructivist paradigm which is examined in this chapter. The methodology that operationalises this approach is discussed at length in the following section.

3.3.1 The Phenomenological Tradition.

Cherry (2000, p.49) states that all qualitative studies are based on phenomenological research traditions. This, according to Cohen *et al.* (2007, pp.23-24), is because they concern themselves with 'the world of everyday life', and a person's living sense of an experience. For Finlay (2009, p.6) the central concern of phenomenological inquiries is 'to return to the embodied, experiential meanings while aiming for a fresh, complex, rich description of a phenomenon as it is concretely lived'. Phenomenology was employed for

this study because of its attractiveness as a research method for educational researchers (Cohen *et al.* 2007, p.25). Furthermore , those who choose to employ this method usually possess some knowledge of the topic under investigation and are interested in developing a more in-depth understanding of it, or 'clarifying potentially conflicting or equivocal information from previous data' (Henry *et al.* 2008, p.10). The author has experience in this field as an educator and foster parent.

As the researcher, I created a context (semi-structured interviews) through which participants' lived experience became available to both the interviewee and interviewer. I created an interview schedule (Appendix C) based on a review of the literature plus a series of 16 exploratory open-ended pilot interviews with various stakeholders to complement the secondary research and triangulate the topics that became the semi structured questions in the interview schedule. These 16 interviewees were not part of the final sample.

The willingness and openness of participants was engineered by creating a climate of trust between the parties. This provided a safe environment where (their) experiences of teaching foster children were openly shared, and priorities and concerns for their education were articulated.

The second step involved transforming what was heard into an understanding. As phenomenology is concerned with the individual's first-hand experiences and perspectives I had to rely on the data produced by participants about their experiences, and from there, produce my own understanding. The third and fourth steps involved transforming this/these understanding(s) into clarifying conceptual categories, which I believed were the essence of the original accounts into a written document through accurate transcription.

The final step involved those who participated in the research contributing to transforming the written document into a further understanding, through member checking and offering an opportunity to clarify or retract as the interviewer saw fit. Only six of the interviewees responded to these clarifications. Doyle (2007, p.883) cited in Carlson (2010, p.1105) states that research should be ' a 'negotiated' process of meaning making with their participants, and should also focus on ways to give power, voice, and

engagement to the participant throughout the research process' At every point in the data capture this researcher was concerned with validity. Carlson (2010, p.1105 citing Creswell and Miller (2000) posited that

> that procedures for trustworthiness, including member checking, should be largely determined by incorporation of three lenses: of the self (the researcher), of the participants, and of the external readers of the final research report. These are the three entities for whom the researcher desires trustworthiness approval, and the lenses through which researchers should view and interpret their work. Data should be continually revisited and scrutinised for accuracy of interpretation and for meaningful, coherent conveyance of the participant's narrative contributions. (p1105)

3.3.2 Paradigm chosen: A Social Constructionist Worldview

Post positivist	Constructivist	Transformative	Pragmatic
Quantitative Experimental Quasi-experimental Co-relational Causal comparative Randomized control trials	Qualitative Naturalistic Interpretative Phenomenological Hermeneutic Symbolic interaction Ethnographic Participatory action research	Action research Critical theory Neo-Marxist Feminist theories Critical race theory Freirean Participatory Emancipatory Postcolonial/ Indigenous Queer theory Disability theories	Mixed methods Mixed models Participatory

Figure 21: 4 paradigms adapted from Flick (2009)

Flick (2009) describes four categories of paradigms together with a list of the variety of terms used to describe each (Figure 21). The paradigm that I am drawn to, because of my philosophical assumptions outlined earlier in this chapter, is social constructionism. Crotty (1998) suggests that constructionism rejects the notion of an absolute, or objective truth waiting for us to discover it: 'Meaning is not discovered but constructed. In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. (Crotty 1998, p.8).

This paragraph aligns with qualitative research that is 'grounded in a philosophical position which is broadly 'interpretivist' in the sense that it is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced or constituted' (Mason 200p.2, 3). Specifically, the study sought to document the foster child's learning trajectory through the lens of the various stakeholders (teachers and social workers). The research questions tease out their experiences to inform best practice in facilitating educational engagement in this cohort behaviour. This inherent focus on the complexity of these settings justifies the choice and use of a qualitative methodology. Ultimately, the strength of qualitative research derives primarily from its focus on specific situations or people (Maxwell 1996). According to Creswell (2008),

> More recent writers who have summarized this position are Lincoln and Guba (2000), Schwandt (2007), Neuman (2000), and Crotty (1998), among others. Social constructivists hold assumptions that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences— meanings directed toward certain objects or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas. The goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied. (p.8)

Hence constructivism recognises that individuals develop subjective meanings of their contextualised experience. These meanings are 'multiple and varied' (Cullen 2013, p.14). As Crotty states 'meaning is not discovered, but constructed' (Crotty 1998, p.10). Therefore, this researcher is a 'co-constructor of knowledge, of understanding and interpretation of lived experiences' (Guba and Lincoln 2005 cited in Lincoln *et al.* 2011, p.106) shaped by my own experience (Creswell 2007, p.20).

3.3.3 Combination of Emancipatory and Pragmatic Research

This research has been designed to explore the views of stakeholders in foster care to relay and inform future policy and tailor services. This research, therefore, contains an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of those who participated, and is also closely linked with the current political agenda. It is claimed that the epistemology behind this research is both emancipatory and pragmatic. It is emancipatory in that in hearing the

'voice' of the stakeholders, change can be actioned within the system to enable them to exploit their resources more effectively. The research is pragmatic in that the interviews can represent the views of the various stakeholders to inform policy in the future.

Michael Foucault (1980) noted that the world as it may be considered to be complicated, confused, impure and uncertain. Social science research does not aim to establish systematic global theory to hold everything in place. Instead, it aims, little by little, to build a 'strategic knowledge' to move us forward.

Guest *et al.*(2013) expands phenomenology beyond that of 'experience' and states as follows: 'In phenomenological research, it is the participants' perceptions, feelings, and lived experiences that are paramount and that are the object of study'. Increments of knowledge are won through a step-by-step process within which great leaps are a considerable rarity. Small bits of insight have to be woven together into the structure of larger webs of understanding.

This author is attempting to bridge the gap between two distinct motivations - a desire to know (basic research), and a motivation to improve (applied research).The applied research element indicated in the action spiral referred to in Figure 22 below is beyond the remit of this research project. However, I do propose investigation into a potential tool (scorecard) to operationalise the insights gleaned from this exploratory project of how multiple stakeholders could more effectively communicate, and fulfil cycle three below, acting on the knowledge. This is fully discussed in the limitations in chapter 5 at the end of the report.
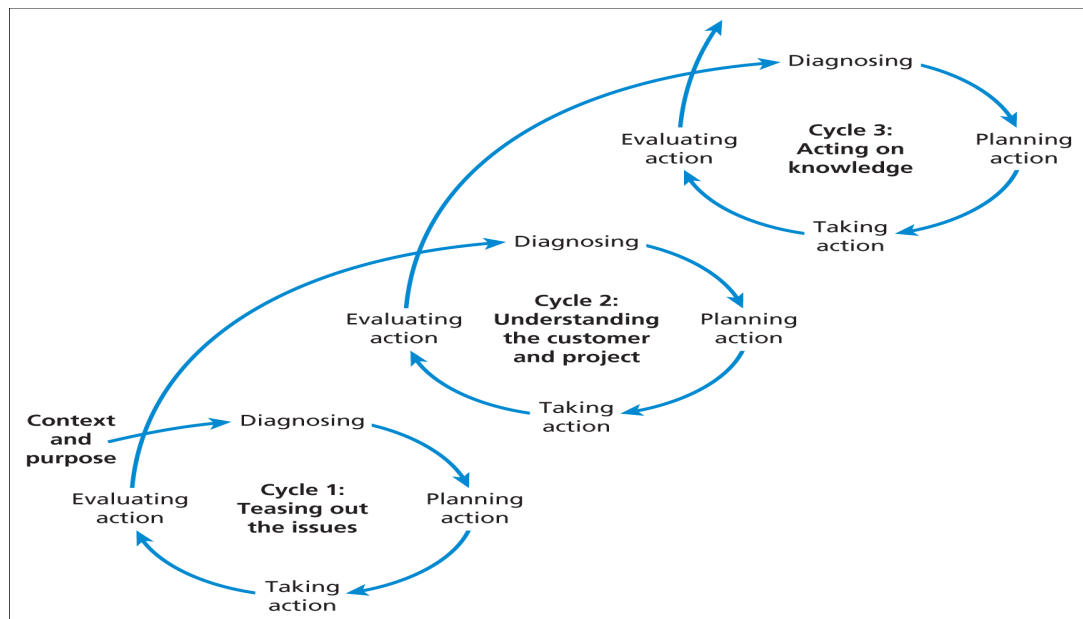
Figure 22: Iterative Cycle of Applied Research

Source :Mark Saunders, Phillip Lewis and Adrian Thornhill 2015

3.4 Methodology: The Interview

The interview according to Dexter (1970, p.123) and repeated in Ribbins (2007, p.208) is a 'conversation with a purpose'.The purpose of the twelve interviews in this study was to prompt the stakeholders in an in-depth discussion on their role as educators of foster children and their experiences. The purpose of interviewing 'is to find out what is inside somebody else's mind but not to put things there' Ribbons (2007, p.208).According to Fontana and Frey (1994, p.361) 'interviewing is one of the most common, and most powerful, ways we use to try to understand our fellow human beings'. Merriam's (2009, p.88) angle is that 'interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behaviour, feelings or how people interpret the world around them'.

I used a semi-structured interview schedule containing fifteen questions. They were adapted accordingly depending on stakeholder context and experience. nine of the interviews were face-to-face whereas the remaining three were by telephone. It was free flowing, and it was interviewee led. This was deliberate since I needed to be aware of the possibility of observer bias for two reasons; firstly that my experience of the issues might lead me to a biased selection of data and secondly, that I may have had expectations that would be likely to emerge, 'selection encoding' (Moyles 2007, p.244). All questions were

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short one-sentence questions. Supplementary or follow up questions were also kept short. This enabled respondents to respond with 'extended, frank and fulsome answers' (Gronn 2007, p.199). I sent the questions in advance taking notice of Ribbins and Marland (1994), who wrote of agreeing an interview schedule in the preparation of guide questions, which are then sent to possible interviewees. They describe their interviews as 'discussions' or 'conversations', rather than adopting the interviews as an exercise in merely asking questions and receiving answers. They also discuss an aspect of flexibility as the interviews or discussions continue stating that 'an advantage over the interview-based approach is that it is possible to revise and renegotiate the agenda of discussion as a natural aspect of the dialogue.'(Ribbins and Marland 1994, p.7).

Depth interviews allow the respondent to say whatever they like about the subject, without intervention from the interviewer and only 'minimum prompting' (Robson 2007, p.270). It is 'neither an open everyday conversation nor a closed questionnaire.' (Kvale and Brinkman 2009, p.27). Finally, semi-structured approaches set the agenda but did not presuppose the nature of the response (Cohen *et al.* 2000).

The interviews allowed for greater depth than is the case with other methods of data collection. Also, following methodological approaches developed by Hodgkinson *et al.* (1996), there was an effort to develop a multidimensional richness in the data by not only talking to teachers, but also to the other stakeholders that influence the agency that the foster students have in their educational trajectory. The flexibility of approach promoted a positive connection between interviewer and interviewee which was a necessary component in engineering trust that was crucial in a phenomenological study

3.4.1 Topics

On designing the interviews, there was an effort to form questions on the basis of what truly needs to be known. The interview schedule consisted of a number of broad areas to be explored covering participants' experiences when dealing with foster children.

The use of in-depth interviews with semi-structured, open-ended questions enriched the research process by affording participants the opportunity to construct their experiences according to their own sense of what was important for them, and what they would choose

to share. The list of topics to be discussed at the face-to-face interviews was offered to the interviewees in advance. Six of the participants indicated that they would 'have a look' at the questions, while the others felt that the dialogue might be more spontaneous, and ultimately more valuable, if the questions were not viewed in advance of the interviews. Fifteen questions/topics were circulated in my Interview Schedule(s). (see Appendix C)

For the purpose of informing and triangulating the interview schedule so that the topics were of utmost relevance I undertook 16 pilot interviews with various stakeholders (foster parents, teachers and social commentators which informed the interview schedule, but were not *de facto* part of the research study. This stage was very useful in professionalising the interview process for the interviewer, and added depth to the interview topics. This along with the literature review added clarity to the interview schedule. These interviews were not included in the final report since their purpose was to inform the interview schedule, raising concerns over potential bias.

3.4.2 Anonymity

As is common practice in academic research, it seemed appropriate that the research participants, and the schools in which they teach, would not be disclosed in the final published thesis. Anonymity and confidentiality are two ways of protecting a participant's right to privacy. Confidentiality requires 'not disclosing information from a participant in any way that might identify that individual or that might enable the individual to be traced. It can also mean not discussing an individual with someone else.'(Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011, p.92). Anonymity in relation to educational research supports the assertion that 'the essence of anonymity is that information provided by participants should in no way reveal their identity.'(Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011, p.91).

3.5. The Sampling Strategy

Sampling in qualitative field research involves the selection of a research site, people and events (Burgess 1982). It is usually non-probabilistic and purposeful (Patton 1990 cited in Merriam 2001). According to Hogan *et al.* (2009)

Sampling in qualitative research is generally purposive, that is, the subjects, or cases, selected for examination are chosen specifically, due to some characteristic of interest to the researcher and her / his research topic. Researchers also play a key role in the research process itself. They are not observing events from a remove, but tend to be intimately involved in the research process.(p.5)

Purposeful sampling is about selecting information-rich cases for in depth study and can be differentiated in many types. Due to the circumstances of the present study, the purposive sampling procedure was used along with conveniency procedures. I have sampled educational stakeholders that included teachers and school principals in second-level schools, social workers, and a Guardian ad litem at the microsystem and mesosystem level, as well as a senior policy maker in the Department of Children's Affairs at the macrosystem level. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) assert that researchers can 'handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement, of their typicality, or possession of the particular characteristics being sought.' (p.114). Table 2 lists the interview participants that contributed to this research. My objective while not purporting to interview a strictly representative sample was to get as many interpretations as possible. The sample was chosen due a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling which needs explanation and justification next.

Denscombe (2010) describes a purposive sample as 'handpicking' a sample population deliberately to explore 'their privileged knowledge or experience about the topic.' (Denscombe 2010, p.35). He writes that purposive sampling works best with a known population when its knowledge and qualities are known to the researcher. He suggests that a purposive sample can be used within a body of people 'when there are good grounds for believing they will be critical to the research.'(Denscombe 2010, p.35).

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Code	Position	Setting	Experience
SO1	Department Childrens Affairs		30 YEARS
SO2	Manager Social Welfare Department)		12 yrs experience
SO3	Social Worker		23 years experience in Social work in England and Ireland
SO4	Guardian *ad Litem*		35 years' experience in Social Work and as a child advocate
PO1	Principal	Private Second Level (co-ed) School	10 years
P02	Principal	Second Level DEIS (single sex: female) School	7 years
P03	Principal	Second Level Private (single sex: female) School	6 years
P04	Principal	Second Level DEIS (single sex: male) School	17 years in England, 2 years Principal Ireland
T01	Teacher	Second Level DEIS School (co-ed)	5 years
T02	Teacher	Second Level School (single sex: male)	3 years
T03	Teacher HSLO	Second Level School (and HSL) (co -ed)	15 years
T04	Teacher	Second Level School (co-ed)	15 years

Table 2: List of Interview Participants.

The sampling was not probable but a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling which has, on reflection, highlighted for this author concerns about accurate representativeness and potential bias. The people that responded had, in some way, an interest in this particular educational trajectory. Hence, the author was in a dialogue with vested interests and these participants have identified stress points through their experiences. This author is aware that he has not sampled stakeholders that have engaged

positively in the main, and hence have no specific opinion ('they just get on with it' according to one interviewee). In the main, academic research tends to explore with the aim to improve and critically evaluate (informing policy to improve) so researchers embrace those who have a story to tell. Those stories usually highlight stress points and hence, the propensity for bias. This has been alluded to in some interviews, with those at the coalface declaring that the good things were under-represented, and the cracks exploited, to drive the agenda for change which (in their mind) is a thread in applied academic research. Whereas quantitative studies have a tool to cope with this non-response (the gini coefficient, Vazquez-Alverez *et al.* 2002) qualitative studies have no such operational tool, and it is a disadvantage of purposive sampling. I shall discuss this aspect in the next section under validity and bias

3.5.1 Validity Benchmarking and Bias.

The discussion will be structured around four criteria of evaluating qualitative studies. The four criteria addressed in quantitative studies – internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity – were recast by different researchers for the needs of naturalistic research. In this study, issues of data trustworthiness were tackled according to a number of the above criteria. Specifically, to guarantee the quality of this study, the following measures were taken: the principle of triangulation, thick description, clarifying researcher bias, and disclosure of decisions. These were applied to rule out threats to validity which concerned issues of design, the data collection methods, interpretation and the extent to which the natural subjectivity of the researcher shapes the research (Marshall and Rossman 1995).

Finding a balance between maintaining control of the interview and allowing the interviewee the space to re-define the topic under investigation and thus to generate novel insights for the researcher (Willig 2001) can be a potential limitation of the interviewing method. Moreover, the possible effects of the interviewer's social identity can impact negatively on the interviewees. In response to these concerns, certain procedures were followed. The first concerned dealing with particular threats of each one of the methods. The second relates to the effort of recording data in the most accurate way. The third relates to triangulation.

In relation to interviews, the first step was to make sure that they were compatible with the study's aims. There was an effort for the right questions to be asked. Also, an effort was made to eliminate interviewer's authority on the interviewees. Developing a good rapport with them and making them feel friendly towards the research was easier than expected. Being of the same nationality, ethnicity and gender, having (roughly) similar age and sharing the same identity – that of the student teacher - helped me to familiarise with student teachers cultural milieu (Willig 2001). Motivation towards the study was achieved by presenting the research as one significant opportunity for them to share their difficulties, and their suggestions, which in turn could positively affect teacher education programmes.

In relation to observation, there was an effort to separate observed data from noting down judgments. In addition, an effort was made to convince newly qualified teachers, in particular, that I was not there to 'watch' them or to assess them as teachers. This was eased by my amiable relationship with the teachers built in mutual respect and trust.

As far as the data recording is concerned, an effort was made to record data in the most accurate way possible to provide a good description of the situation under investigation. The inaccuracy or incompleteness of the data can be a significant threat to valid description (Maxwell 1996). For this reason, interviews were audio recorded and verbatim transcribed; processes which largely solve this problem (Maxwell 1996) It was a means of thick description that provided rich data. Rich data are detailed enough to provide a revealing picture of what is going on since they give the context of an act, how it develops and the intentions that organise it (Denzin 1989).

3.5.2 Triangulation.

Interview data were also validated through triangulation. 'Triangulation is a way of enriching and completing knowledge and (towards) transgressing the always limited epistemological potentials of the individual method.' (Flick (1998) cited in Willig 2001, p.76).

The interview schedule was triangulated both from the literature review and from sixteen substantive pilot interviews with foster parents and other teachers to illuminate areas of

interest. They informed the primary research rather than being part of it. I conducted 12 qualitative interviews - 4 with principals, 4 with teachers (one doubling as HSLO), 2 *Tusla* social workers (one manager and 2 social workers), one Guardian *ad Litem* and one senior policy maker in The Departnment of Children and Youth Affairs. I determined that I should interview them for a period of between 45-90 minutes each.

The author did not use a triangulation of methods despite Guba and Lincoln's (1981, p.155) contention that 'research based solely on interviews may be sabotaged and crippled', and Gronn's (2007,p.199) reservations about the advisability 'of using interviews in leadership research as sole sources of data procurement'. Also 'when relying on a single source of data, the risk of an undetected error increases' (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995). Therefore, the principle of triangulation is used to increase the reliabilityand internal validity of a study (Stake 1995; Yin 1984).

Another threat concerns interpretation, and the threat to be ruled out here is imposing one's interpretation, one's own framework or meaning, rather than understanding the perspective of the participants (Maxwell 1996). Hence, I tried to be conscious of the danger of over-identification with interviewees and I was aware that mere acceptance of what they say forecloses opportunities to develop more encompassing and varied interpretations (Delamont 1992; Woods 1979).

For this reason, the author tried to listen for the participants' perspectives, and avoided asking leading questions. Also, responses were validated by the participants themselves. In most cases, summaries of their own responses were given to the participants. They were invited to make changes, if necessary and to add any further information or comments. Testing my interpretive constructions in this way was important in establishing evidence of credibility and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Clarifying my thinking, purposes, and beliefs – in other words, developing my reflexivity as a researcher – was a necessary part of this process.

> It is only possible to observe from within one's own historical location;
> thus human inquiry is inevitably interpretive and inherently subjective.
> Subjectivity is not bias (Greene 2007, p.40).

Miles and Huberman acknowledge the subjectivity of the qualitative researcher and state 'any research no matter how unstructured or inductive comes to fieldwork with some orientating ideas foci and tools.'(Miles Huberman 1994, p.273) It is impossible to put aside one's own perspectives totally, but Elliot *et al.*, (1999) advocated that the subject knowledge and values of the researcher 'can help to better understand represent the informants experiences more adequately than otherwise would have been possible' (Elliot *et al.* 1999, p.216)

The researcher had a very clear goal in data gathering to allow the data to speak for itself, and in that way, remove the implied bias of the researcher`s background knowledge of the research topic. In more traditional research methodologies research assumptions could have been seen as 'bias and should be eliminated from the study' (Rathith and Riggan 2012). This was the viewpoint taken by many early traditionalists. Post-positivists have argued that subject knowledge is a bonus to the researcher rather than to be taken as 'an affliction, something to bear because it could not be foregone, could to the contrary be taken as to be virtuous.' (Glesne & Peshkin 1992, p.104). Validity is thus a requirement for both quantitative and qualitative research'(Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011, p.179).

Wiersma (1995) states that 'validity of qualitative research, for the most part, is established on a logical basis, and providing an argument for validity requires well-documented research and a comprehensive description.'(Wiersma 1995, p.273) I attended to these two requirements to ensure data validity in the following ways. Chapter two in this dissertation reviewed the literature and identified the main areas of study for this piece of research. These chapters fulfil the descriptive task that a clear audit trail exists from analysis back to source data.

3.5.3 Reflexivity

Qualitative research does not use standardised research instruments and procedures (Breuer *et al.* 2002). The researcher's background does have a significant bearing on the interpretation of the data (Delamont 1992). The qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behaviour, and interviewing participants. They may use an instrument, but it is one designed by the researcher using open-ended questions. The way in which the 'self' of the researcher is used as a research

tool is both a strength, and a defining characteristic of ethnographic approaches (Pollard 1996), as well as the main reason for its low reputation (Breuer *et al.* 2002).

The goal of a qualitative study is not to eliminate reactivity but to understand it, and to use it productively. Reflexivity provides researchers with the means of understanding how the values and expectations they bring to the study may influence their conclusions. In this way, reflexivity can add to the trustworthiness of the study (Watt, 2007). Figure 23 summarises the various perspectives that the reflective practitioner needs to balance.
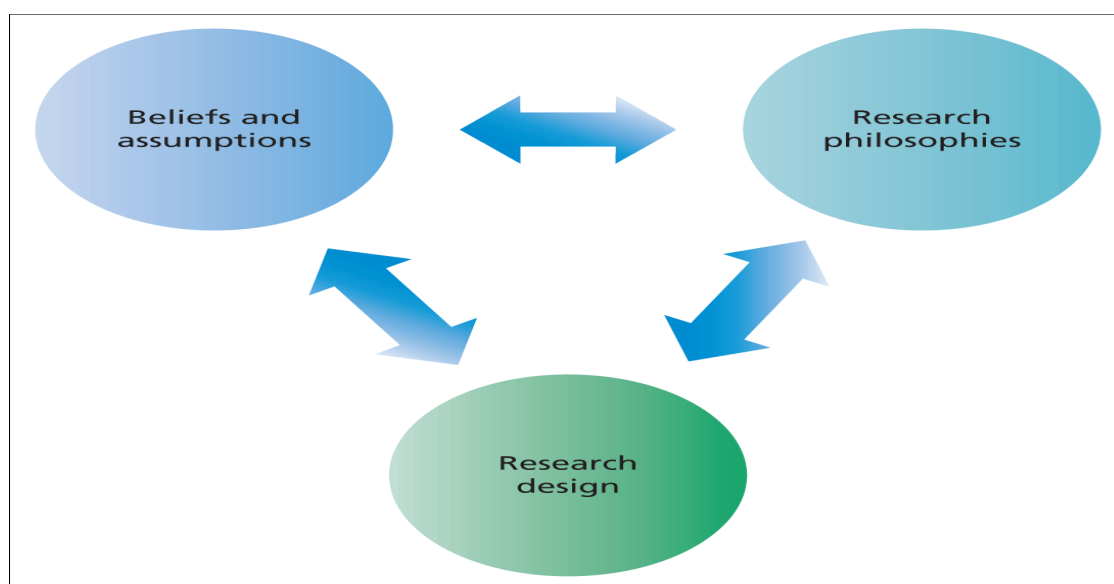

Figure 23: The Reflective process

Source :Mark Saunders, Phillip Lewis and Adrian Thornhill 2015

Interpretation was informed by my background and interest in the field of foster care and by my knowledge and experience as a foster carer for the past eight years. Recognising thus my bias and preconceptions, and how these can affect interpretations, was a necessary part of the analytical process.

First, my ideas reflect and are reflected by the theoretical lens within which the study was couched. I entered the field expecting some tensions among, for instance, the aims. At the same time, these expectations became points of attention. Realising them helped me to safeguard, to an extent, my analysis of preconceptions and bias. This was complemented by the delivery of plain language statements, informed consent forms and ensuring the confidentiality of participants involvement. (these are attached in Appendix A and B)

3.6 Approaches to Data Analysis

The analysis of qualitative data can take many forms and is influenced by a myriad of factors, such as epistemological stances, ontological experiences, and methods used, all of which are discussed in this chapter. The general aim of data analysis can be summarised as 'moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of data.' (Creswell 2009, p.183). Mears (2012, p.172) warns that with semi-structured interviews 'you cannot be certain exactly where the answer will lead. The first response you hear may be a general description but buried in the response; you find the markers that point to other areas to explore'. The concerns expressed by Barber (2006, pp.149-152), that 'researchers cannot afford to take the 'obvious' for granted' encouraged me to cofine my judgements and conclusions to actual words that were used and to relate these words to concepts in the leadership literature.

One of the challenges of qualitative research lies in the fact that the data can be large and unwieldy due to its reliance on prose from interview transcripts and field notes (Bryman 2012). Miles (1979) warns of the difficulty for researchers of navigating through rich sets of data while Lofland (1971, p.18) cautions researchers not to fall into the trap of 'analytic interruptus', where a researcher fails to really engage in a true data analysis due to the wealth of data. As stated above, the interviews were recorded on a voice recorder and extra notes were taken throughout, and immediately following, the interviews. These notes included records of my perceptions of interviewees comfort levels in the interviews, their willingness to answer questions, and also my own thoughts on individual interview dynamics or events that took place during the interviews, such as interviewees becoming upset. These recorded reactions were utilised in the data analysis process, and are referred to in more detail in the presentation of findings in the next chapter.

3.6.1 Thematic Analysis

In analysing the data, I followed a framework (as detailed in Table 3 below) suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) for use in thematic analysis, a recognised qualitative analytic method. Thematic analysis 'is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns

(themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p.79). However, 'it also often goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic.' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p.83).

The Braun and Clarke model (2006) is comprehensive, and its step-by-step structure made it easy to follow and apply. I believe, because it is interpretative in nature, that it fits in well with the social constructionism paradigm in which I have situated my research. The six steps are outlined in Table 3.

Phase	Description of Process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the data set, collating all data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic map of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and overall story the analysis tells, Generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature.

Table 3: Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke (2006, 2012)

Another advantage is that:

> it is a method, not a methodology …(hence) it is not tied to any epistemological or theoretical perspective. This makes it a very flexible method, a considerable advantage given the diversity of work in learning and teaching…. it also enforces a well structure approach to handling data (Maguire and Delahunt 2017, p.2).

Nowell *et al.* (2017) declare 'If readers are not clear about how researchers analyzed their data or what assumptions informed their analysis, evaluating the trustworthiness of the research process is difficult.' (p.2) since Braun and Clarke's approach to thematic analysis is a method, and it is flexible, it requires a model to induce trust in the qualitative analysis. Nowell *et al.*(2017, p.4) offers a means of establishing trustworthiness through the different phases of thematic analysis. (Figure 24).

Table 1. Establishing Trustworthiness During Each Phase of Thematic Analysis.

Phases of Thematic Analysis	Means of Establishing Trustworthiness
Phase 1: Familiarizing yourself with your data	Prolong engagement with data Triangulate different data collection modes Document theoretical and reflective thoughts Document thoughts about potential codes/themes Store raw data in well-organized archives Keep records of all data field notes, transcripts, and reflexive journals
Phase 2: Generating initial codes	Peer debriefing Researcher triangulation Reflexive journaling Use of a coding framework Audit trail of code generation Documentation of all team meeting and peer debriefings
Phase 3: Searching for themes	Researcher triangulation Diagramming to make sense of theme connections Keep detailed notes about development and hierarchies of concepts and themes
Phase 4: Reviewing themes	Researcher triangulation Themes and subthemes vetted by team members Test for referential adequacy by returning to raw data
Phase 5: Defining and naming themes	Researcher triangulation Peer debriefing Team consensus on themes Documentation of team meetings regarding themes Documentation of theme naming
Phase 6: Producing the report	Member checking Peer debriefing Describing process of coding and analysis in sufficient details Thick descriptions of context Description of the audit trail Report on reasons for theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices throughout the entire study

Figure 24: Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria

Source : (Nowell *et al.* 2017, p.8)

To obtain trustworthiness, I took notes during the interviews as a coding commentary to seek out latent meanings of what was being said; annoyance, or resignation, or a sigh. It is all data and I assessed that I may be able to identify some latent themes. Also, after each interview I made copious notes of what transpired to triangulate the interview data that was voice recorded. Finally, I spent two months analyzing, coding and developing themes around the research question. This deep immersion enabled both deductive and inductive analysis to complement the themes from literature that drove the interview schedule(s).

Another pitfall in thematic analysis could be that the data has been summarised but not analysed, using the questions in the interview schedule as the themes (Braun and Clarke 2013). Braun and Clarke expanded by discussing 'top down' analysis, driven by a specific research question, and/or the authors focus on a 'bottom up' approach, purely driven by the data (Braun and Clark 2006, p.84 cited by Nowell *et al.* 2017). 'If readers are not clear about how researchers analysed their data, or what assumptions informed their analysis, evaluating the trustworthiness of the research process is difficult' (Nowell *et al.* 2017, p2). This research is driven by the research question of the challenges that face the education of foster children from the perspective of social workers, and teachers. Therefore, it is driven by a 'top down' analysis. However, it did endeavour to research inductive and latent themes in its analysis.

One of the challenges was to formulate themes where there was overlap in codes. Again, the research took comfort in Braun and Clark where they explain,

> Sections of data may be included in multiple themes with some overlap between themes (Pope, Ziebland, & Mays, 2000). At this stage, researchers may consider how each theme fits into the overall story about the entire data set in relation to the research questions (Braun & Clarke 2006, cited in Nowell *et al.* 2016, p.10)

3.7 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The phases of thematic analysis are outlined in Figure 25 which recount the depth and iteration of analysis required to use this method.
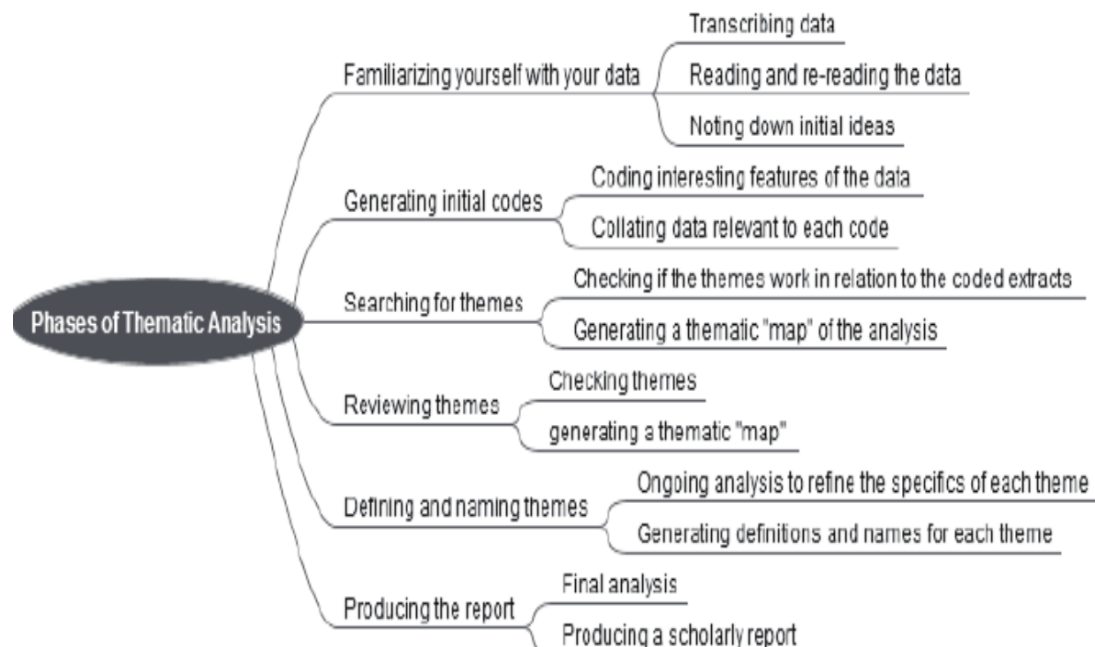

Figure 25: Stages of Thematic Analysis

Source : Braun and Clarke (2006, p.87)

3.7.1 Step 1. Data Familiarity

I initially coded the data after each round of interviews, which took place between 2017 – 2018.I carried out the first three steps at the start of 2018, and it me took two months to complete the thematic analysis. The initial step involved familiarising myself with the data by listening to an audio of all the interviews a couple of times, before I started the transcription process.. Getting close to the data was a necessary step before I could start the data reduction phase of my analysis as 'one of the enduring problems of qualitative data analysis is the reduction of copious amounts of written data to manageable and comprehensive proportions (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011, p.559). An extended period of continuous listening to the recordings and reading the transcripts facilitated a process of coding, or indexing, which was the starting point for my analysis (Lofland and Lofland 1995; Bryman 2012). It enabled a way into the 'thick descriptions' (Geertz 1994).

3.7.2 Step 2.Initial Coding

One of the ways that I addressed this challenge of the large dataset was by using a process known as coding. Coding has been described by Kerlinger (1970) as a process of assigning responses of the respondents to specific categories for the purpose of analysis. I chose not to use computer-assisted coding tools such as NVivo, taking into account Seidel *et al.'s* concerns (cited in Welsh 2002) that using tools such as NVivo distances the researcher from the data. The researcher's focus, they feel, is distracted from the recorded interviews and the written transcripts. They believe that the insights which are gained from close proximity with the data in its 'raw' state are lost, and interpretation is consequently poorer. There are, of course, counter-arguments, for example, Lewins and Silver (2007) indicating that the ease with which data can be accessed increases the researcher's closeness to it.

The second stage of the Braun and Clarke (2006) model involved generating codes and I started open coding according to my research question, initially around the three research topics, which are experiences of teachers in teaching foster children, obstacles encountered (along with associated solutions to those obstacles), and experiences dealing with stakeholders. These topics, as a starting point, were called domains, not themes at this point, since it is an iterative process and I was aware that I wished to develop the themes inductively in step 3. I conducted open coding on the total data corpus of 168 responses from 12 respondents to 15-18 questions in the interview schedule[25] to provide initial shape and context.

Domain (Key areas of Interest)	Themes	Sub-themes	Codes attached to each theme/sub-theme
Experiences in teaching Foster Children			extra paperwork other agencies burden time needed discipline attention

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[25] It was semi structured interviewing technique, hence there was variation in the number of responses.

			peers
			HSE/*Tusla*
			unaware
			weaker ability
			other staff
			disengagement
			school change
			good relations
			unqualified
			HSCL
			other agencies
			everyone has a story
			hygiene
			neglect
			under-resourced
			culture
			colleague support
			vocation
			leaning contract
			attendance records
			grade scores
			worry
			happy
Obstacles encountered with Foster Children			
Dealing with stakeholders			
Resourcing Needs			

Table 4: Stage 2 coded just for domain 1. No themes

3.7.3 Step 3. Identification of Themes

At this point I refined the codes into themes, and then sub-themes, and then back to the domains that I had earlier stated as a starting point. I cleaned and found that I needed at least one more domain on influences that help educational engagement in foster children as identified by the direct stakeholders, and a miscellaneous catch-all theme. Hence, there were many codes that overlapped. I also considered some themes that fit heterogeneously.

Going back and forth with the stages fitted with their interpretation of how the model should be used. In a follow-up publication by Braun and Clarke (2013), in which they

reviewed the original model, they stated that 'this should not be viewed as a linear model, where one cannot proceed to the next phase without completing the prior phase (correctly): rather analysis is a recursive process' (Braun and Clarke 2013, p.123).

Domain (Key areas of Interest)	Themes	Sub-themes	Codes attached to each theme/sub-theme
Experiences in teaching Foster Children School Perspective	Practical day to day	Administration	extra paperwork other agencies over burdened time needed discipline attention good culture
		Identification of foster children	peers HSE /*Tusla* Unawareness weaker ability other staff academic ability school change hygiene relationship
	Evaluation of FC	Internal evaluation	unqualified HSCL other agencies time needed burden colleague support formal tests attendance records professional competence
		External outside bodies	academic evaluation (HSCL, JCSP, NEPS, DOTS)

Table 5: Coded for Themes and Sub-Themes for Domain 1.

3.7.4 Step 4. Review of Themes

After I had categorised the data into themes, the next step was to review them to consider how heterogenous they were, and to make decisions on the overlapping codes that existed in a number of themes. At this point I identified in the corpus of data two emergent themes, and one latent theme, that were worthy of consideration. They included the agency each stakeholder had, or felt they had, in determining educational outcomes of foster children. This corresponded with one latent theme that kept coming up in my coding commentary from teachers, and school principals, which this researcher initially termed 'frustration' This was expressed by signs of fatigue, inarticulation, and uncertainty in a number of responses which, on reflection, matched the emergent theme of agency, and the stakeholder's inability to determine outcomes. Interestingly, this theme did not appear in the interviews with social workers. The second theme that emerged was the perception from the stakeholders of how the age and gender of the foster child had a bearing on educational attainment and engagement. This drove the researcher back to the literature to triangulate iteratively. On reviewing the framework, I could see that really, my domains were in fact themes, and I adjusted accordingly.

3.7.5 Step 5.Defining Themes.

In March 2018, I pursued the coding process again, but this time in a more intensive manner. I re-familiarised myself with the data and reviewed the themes I had previously identified. I was now at the penultimate stage of the Braun and Clarke (2006) model. This involved not just more clearly defining my themes, but also looking for more clearly defined sub-themes, and sub-sub-themes in the data, or what Creswell called 'the 'family' of themes with children, and even grandchildren' (Creswell 1998, p.153) .

This involved further categorisation of the data into six distinct themes:
1.   Knowledge about foster children in the school environment.
2.   Attitudes towards the educational supports that teachers can request.
3.   Attitudes towards the influences that affect foster children face in their educational remit.
4.   Barriers to educational attainment as perceived by the stakeholders.

5. Attitudes towards the multiple stakeholders involved, and how they influence the profession of teaching foster children, and whether the research respondents had a positive, or negative, predisposition towards it.

6. Responses that related to implementation procedures or practices.

The final themes were 6 five discrete themes, with 13 sub-themes and numerous sub-sub-themes, from 182 responses to 15-18 questions, from 12 respondents.

6 Themes	13 Sub-themes	Sub Themes identified (selection)	Codes attached to each theme/sub-theme
Experiences in teaching Foster Children School Perspective	Roles and Responsibilities		
	Identification of foster children	Access to Supports Invisibleness	
Educational Supports for teachers	Internal Processes and Procedures		
	External Supports		
Influences on Foster Child	School Influences		
	Peer Influences		
	Supportive Relationships with Appropriate Adults	Consistency of relationships	
Educational Barriers for Foster Children	Stability in placement and School		

	Disengagement from School	Pre-care Experiences Timing of Supports Timing when entering care Reasons for care Age on entering care	
	Expectations of Success		
Relationships with Multiple Stakeholders	Teachers Lack Agency	Hierarchical Role of Stakeholder Relationships Equality of Burden	
Key Resources Required	Training and recognition		
	Other Supports	Academic supports Emotional supports Stakeholder Supports	

Table 6: Final Thematic Table

3.7.6 Step 6 Writing up Findings.

The final stage of the six steps involved writing up my findings chapter. I was very conscious of linking up my themes to my research question in relation to the attitudes, emotions and implementation practices of the respondents towards educating foster children. Because of the inductive nature of my research, writing up my findings identified some themes that I had not initially considered. This suggested some fresh topics for my literature review. A pertinent example of this was the issue of building trust between the various educational stakeholders via strengthening cooperation as 'a final step in data analysis involves making an interpretation or meaning of the data' (Creswell 2009, p.189).

3.7.7 Identification of emergent themes.

After coding and indexing the interview data, I identified both empirical and conceptual themes emerging from the data. This further informed my literature review and the theoretical framework used for the study, thus leading me to search for further relevant literature. For example, following my initial coding, it was necessary for me to read further on the topic of socialisation of the child, gender, age and time in care, the hierarchical power relationships between stakeholders, and definitions of success and institutional contexts, which emerged as themes in the data from the outset of my fieldwork.
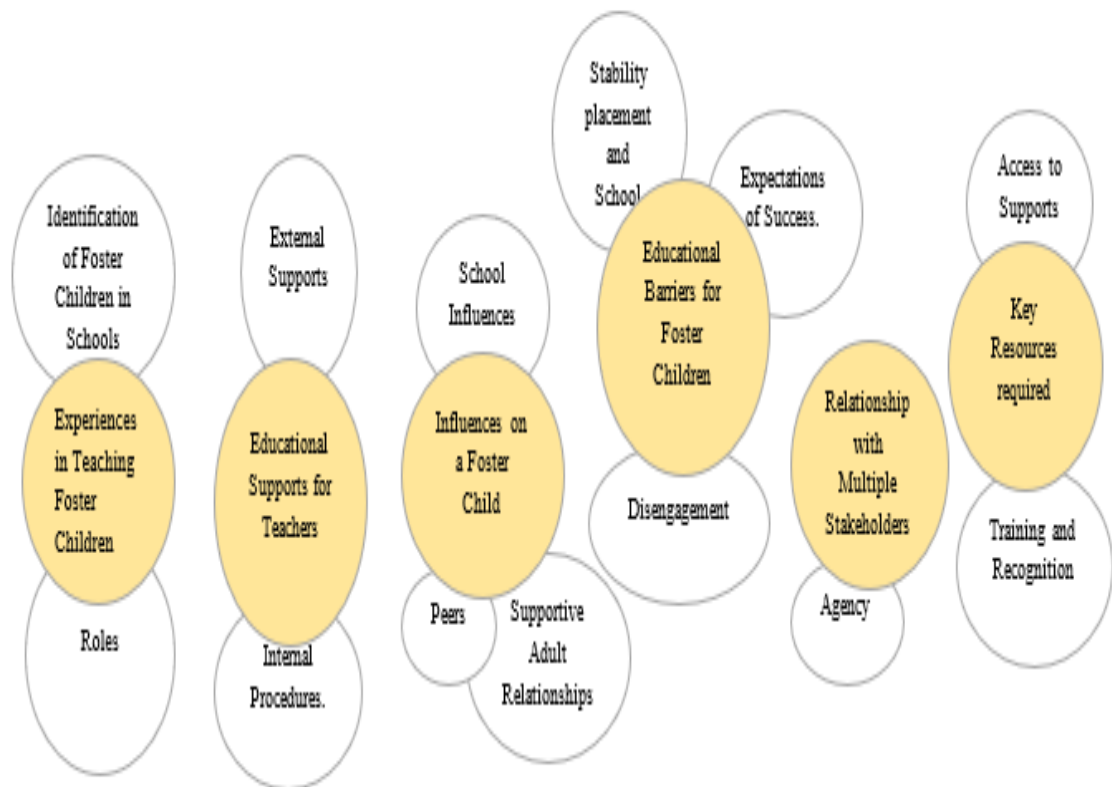

Figure 26: Thematic Map

Dominant Themes (Yellow) and Sub-Themes

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Wellington (2000, p.54) hypothesises that 'an ethic is a moral principle or code of conduct which governs what people do'. In the context of qualitative research, Yin (2009, p.73) maintains that 'the study of a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context obligates you to important ethical practices akin to those followed in medical research'. During this research, I subscribed to an ethical code that precluded generating 'greater risks of harm to participants' (Busher and James 2007, p.107), or inducing stress, or being unnecessarily intrusive. I was conscious that carrying out research may involve 'a series of emergent or immanent ethical moments' (Usher 2000, p.162).

Before the commencement of the study, the researcher received ethics approval from the DCU ethics committee in accordance with the guidelines of this university. As all participants in the study are adult volunteers, this was considered by the university to be a low-risk study. In line with the university`s Plain Language Statement requirements, all participants were provided with details of the study, including working title, purpose and aims of the study. They were informed that as volunteers, they could withdraw at any time that they wished. They were given details of their involvement with the study, including details of how interviews would be conducted, and they were informed that recordings and transcriptions would be made, with their agreement. They were informed that they could request a copy of their interview transcript, and make any changes to the transcript as they wished..

There were no perceived risks to participants, and they were assured of confidentiality. They were advised that the study intended to add to the dialogue on the educational remit of foster children, and it was hoped that participants might benefit indirectly from the study findings. They were assured that the researcher would make every effort to respect their anonymity and that all notes, transcripts, and recordings would be stored in a secure location. The researcher has included the plain language statement, the ethics proposal from DCU plus the informed consent form in Appendix.B, D and E.

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the epistemological and methodological approaches adopted for the conduction of this study. It has outlined the interpretivist and qualitative research design and methodology utilised in the undertaking of this research. These assumptions underpinned my research design and architecture, and led me to adopt a social constructionist paradigm utilising an adapted socio-ecological framework in this research project. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 stakeholders.

The ethical considerations and limitations of the study are also clearly outlined.

The data collection phase preceded the challenging stages of data analysis and interpretation, and here I used a thematic analysis model devised by Braun and Clarke (2006). The combined effect of adhering to these data validating practices means the author can attest to the accuracy and the quality of the findings generated as a result of this dissertation. The next chapter introduces the reader to the major findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction.

A lot of research has been carried out in Ireland on the educational outcomes for children in care (Brady and Gilligan 2018; Darmody, McMahon and Banks 2013; Roarty *et al.* 2018; Loftus 2017; Moran, McGregor, and Devaney 2016; McMahon and Curtain 2013; McSherry *et al.* 2016; Brady and Dolan 2007; Daly 2012). This volume of research has also complemented international research (O'Higgins *et al.* 2015; Welbourne *et al.* 2012; Jackson and Höjer 2013; Jackson and McParlin 2006; Emerson and Lovitt 2003). This research, in the main, either concentrated on the challenges of social workers, the effects on children in care, or focused on the stability of placements, educational outcomes, and aftercare services for the foster child. Darmody, McMahon and Banks (2013) stated:

> Finally, much of the research in Ireland, and elsewhere, has tended to focus on wider social care issues, rather than on factors specific to children's access to, and participation in, education. (Darmody, McMahon and Banks 2013, p.18).

Hence, there is evidentially a lacuna on perspectives from the direct stakeholders responsible for the education of children in care; the school principals, the teachers and their role in teaching foster children. However, they cannot operate in isolation, considering that foster children have multiple stakeholders that are statutorily responsible for their welfare, including education. This research is focused on the role of teachers, school principals, and social workers, who need to work together to optimise a foster child's educational attainment. This chapter takes the perspectives of these stakeholders and asks how successful they feel they have optimised the educational opportunities for foster children, and also looks at the challenges they face in both the microsystems of direct engagement, and the lateral connections in the mesosystem, which they need to navigate. The perspectives of the agents in the school context - the teachers and school principals - are complemented by the perspectives of social workers, who play an influential role in how effective teachers may be.

The findings are presented here under six themes and sub themes developed from what has been described in the previous chapter. They shall be identified by letters indicating their position; P for principal, T for teacher and S for social worker. I interviewed 4 school

principals (PO1-P04; 2 in *DEIS*[26] schools, 2 in fee paying schools); 4 teachers(TO1-TO4), one social worker (SO3), one *Tusla* Manager and Social Worker (SO2);and one senior policy advisor in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (SO1). This research was coded using open coding, not line by line coding and the participants in this study were articulate, concise and informed.

This chapter begins with an outline of the experiences of the stakeholders in a school setting, the teachers and school principals, who are in active engagement in providing education to foster children. The next section shall consider the obstacles and challenges that face teachers in teaching foster children, through the lens of those tasked with the educational remit. This will include all stakeholders. Also, a number of sub-themes shall be explored as discrete aspects identified in the primary research. Section 3 shall drill into the roles and influences of multiple stakeholders, and their experiences in this collaborative process of enabling foster children optimize their educational engagement. The final Section 4 will look at the recommendations and resourcing requirements that the stakeholders have identified.

The participants in this study were professional educators or social workers. They were articulate and possessed informed opinions on their respective work contexts. Therefore, in seeking to provide a thick description of the case, numerous and extensive quotations from the interviewees are presented in the findings of this study. These extensive quotations also provide 'adequate raw data prior to interpretation so that the readers can consider their own alternative interpretations and make their own generalizations' (Stake 1995, p.87). The multiple perspectives allowed a rich complex picture to emerge. (Creswell 2012, p. 18)

4.1 Theme 1. Experiences in teaching foster children.

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[26] The Department of Education and Skills had a range of national programmes in place to address educational disadvantage throughout the public school system. In 2005, following a review of these programmes, the Department published DEIS - Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools: an action plan for educational inclusion . DEIS is a more integrated approach to the issue of educational inclusion which provides for a standardised system for identifying and regularly reviewing levels of disadvantage and a new integrated School Support Programme (SSP) to bring together and build upon the previous schemes and programmes (Department of Edcuation and Sciience 2006).

4.1.1 Boundary Roles and Responsibilities of Teachers

Recent research suggests that children in care have increased levels of special education needs, nearly three times as high as their majority population peers (Sebba *et al*., 2015; Trout *et al*.,2008). With the multitude of reasons that children enter care, a lot of responsibility is given to the school in relation to educational attainment for those in care. (Loftus 2017, Jackson and McParlin 2006). This is obviously a contentious issues since it places a burden on the school to cater for the consequences of neglect and the trauma that pre-dates care (Berridge et al, 2008; Fostering Network, 2006; Berridge, 2012b; Welbourne & Leeson, 2012). There appears to be an element of frustration here with the lack of dialogue between the agencies. However, all the teachers insist that at least when they are in school, they have a place to influence them.

> ……but the ones that worry you are the ones that just stop coming to school we have no control over them and in some situations, we would be warned off and that is frustrating since I could suspect there is a vulnerable child but my suspicions were rarely if ever acted upon (PO2)

> if they are in school we have some influence on them, the biggest fear are the one who just stop attending, then we just don't know…that is the biggest fear (TO3)

However, all participants in the study appear burdened by the role of educators for children with problems that are beyond the capability of the teacher, social worker and school principal This is accentuated by the lack of agency they feel in the controlling the educational outcomes of children in care. What emerged from interpreting the transcripts was the expanded responsibilities that teachers had to cope with the challenges foisted upon schools to deal with problems that originate outside of school. This reflects Gustavvson and MacEachron (2012) assertion that 'educational problems do not occur in isolation they are almost always accompanied with other challenges like poverty maltreatment neglect attachment disorder, foster children are more likely to have behaviour, and mental health problems poor grades'(p.83). The following comments by interview participants illustrate this point.

it is definitely increasingly being a drain on our time and resources. We are sometimes overwhelmed since we really don't have the professional staff, we have teachers who double up as counsellors but we have some students with serious issues and they need professional help I mean issues around their mental health and they are waiting too long and these kids require urgent attention, it's a problem. (PO1)

In relation to access to support services and it's not just foster children …we have all sorts of problems from neglect, hunger anti-social behaviour , all issues that we must deal with every day……it is very hard for the child to learn with competing pressures like that…and all the support services have long waiting lists and that is not ideal when we need urgent professional support for example depressive disorders, self-harm of which we have had a number of cases. CAMHS[27] for example are under resourced and in fairness all social services are and we are expected to pick up the slack.(TO2)

The frustration for a school is that we are very good at dealing with normal problems the ones we see day in and day out and parents must trust the school. However, when children's needs extend outside the normal range you begin to expose people's inexperience like mental health, bereavement etc. people just do not know how to react. We are lucky here in that we have two full time guidance counsellors here who do a lot of work in giving emotional support and could be doing this all day….and this is another challenge (PO3).

These three excerpts came from two principals and a teacher wo considered the boundary aspects of the work that they do. The term 'overwhelmed' used by PO1 was a good summary of how they felt. There was consensus among the participants that there was an unfair burden placed on the school. There were other comments from teachers and school principals on the burden placed on a school to manage the myriad of social issues that need to be dealt with in the classroom. Some Principals noted that the pressures came from parents, which represented some of the stakeholders that the school need to facilitate.

We have multiple influences with the board of Management the staff and I include myself here and we are also responsible to the parents who may demand from us. However, I would urge parents to respect the school and our position. I don't tell them how to run their home so I

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[27] CAMHS stands for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and is a service that provides assessment and treatment for young people and their families who are experiencing mental health difficulties (HSE ,2018)

don't want them to tell me how to run my school…….and you would have those factions influencing you tipping your hand. Oh yes, the one thing about parents that pay for education is that they care and support their school. (PO4).

Dealing with suspicions of childhood neglect and the effect of negative outside influences has been highlighted by all respondents. This has expanded the boundary roles that teachers must pursue to facilitate the child's educational path, like counselling emotional support dealing with various social services. TO1 spoke of 'feeling overwhelmed', T04 spoke of 'waiting lists' and 'suicidal students'. This was all perceived as beyond the remit of a functioning teacher. PO2 noted 'all I could do was offer emotional support'.

school picks up a lot of social problems….we as teachers need more support the children need more support...in particular in relation to mental health and depression , we can do so much but really, we are amateurs when it comes to mental health…we need more resources. (TO4)

This Principal explained the various challenges that pervade the school classroom, without either recognition or adequate supports to remedy wider societal issues.

a lot of behaviour is learned behaviour. You cannot work though all the world's problems in schools. I think they are great in socializing children providing them with normative behaviour, great that what schools are good at but as a dumping ground for binge drinking underage sex drugs whatever I don't think it's fair for schools to cope (PO4).

With the likelihood of extensive emotional and behavioral problems and educational obstacles, it is no easy task for schools to meet the needs of children who live in foster care. It is suggested that school-based interventions involve collaboration among stakeholders (child welfare, school, and home), and address internalizing and externalizing behaviors as well as academic deficits (Scherr, 2010). Teachers should be

notified of a student's foster care status so that they can collaborate with the appropriate stakeholders; however, this is not always the case.

4.1.2 Identification of foster children in school.

There are multiple factors that make up the experiences of teachers in the school setting. The first area of interest that came up in the findings was the lack of any formal system to identify foster children in schools. A common thread that ran throughout the interviews at the outset were the problems of identification of foster children and the tools that were used to identify weaker students that include foster children. In asking about their experiences, a cross section of responses emerged. TO2 replied that, 'it's hard to know, there appears to be no formal process….sometimes we are told, sometimes, not …..I have been here three years and I know of three students who were fostered, and I taught one of them'. Another teacher TO3 commented 'we have a school with over 500 pupils and I may have the class for just 45 minutes a day so…… it's hard to tell. Also, TO1 'unless someone tells us whether that be Tusla, their school friends or other teachers I really find it hard to tell.' School principals were also aware of the problems with identification.

> Well in truth I can only speak from my own school …which I have been here for 12 years. ……it's complicated but in my own experience we have maybe the most contact with the students so will be able to pick up on issues. Yes, we try to provide stability and be a constant in their lives…that's when we know, when we are told usually is some time before it comes to light(PO1).

Another principal commented that the lack of awareness and obstacles in building relationships (which would be a prime building block of engagement and identification of a foster child's backstory) is that:

> the big problem is that there are no gaps in the timetable, so I cannot engineer time for students. It is a challenge here….there are supports available but we need a buy-in (from the students). (PO2)

The identification of foster children in the school context is a challenge. Research in the literature has accurately described the lack of foster students ' representativeness' in the school system. Vacca (2008) is of the view that 'the education of foster children is often

overlooked, and they are one of the most educationally vulnerable populations in our schools'.(p.1080). Brodie (2000) cited by Kiersey (2012) also mentioned the under representation of foster children in the schooling system as they are usually only representing 'a tiny minority in any one school and may not, in fact, be perceived as a distinct group or expected to present problems' (p.26). Hence they may neither have agency or representativeness. The problem of agency and representativeness is mirrored in Ireland, where Darmody Banks McMahon (2013) also referred to the statistics compiled for foster children and confirmed that 'the data does not treat children in care separately from all children'(p,30). The problem is compounded by the foster child's urge to be seen as individuals not defined by their 'care status', and who sought control over what information others had on them (Jackson 1998, p.48; Moran et al. 2017; Scott and Gustavsson 2010). The findings mirror these concerns.

> some kids in foster care just want to be the same as all others and a lot of them don't say they are in foster care, and these may not need support **(SO2).**

> some kids don't want schools to know so that is a difficulty ,now I know one girl now woman in her early 40s now who is in Australia and CEO of a big company and I met her in a homeless shelter and she had run away for a very good reason and her school, an inner city all catholic school was great …and she always went to school and it was a teacher who always had clean shirts…but the other thing that I am very keen on and I don't think we hear very much about is ambition for children in foster care. We have children placed from a very young age so there may have been challenges antenatally but their placement may be very steady and really foster care should not become the defining characteristic, it should not define them (SO1)

There are two observations here with competing validity. The first is empowering that children do not to be wished to be 'defined' by being in care. The second is that without 'representation', schools are hampered in offering tailored supports for foster children. This view of children in care within schools has a tendency to render their problems invisible to a certain extent. This is a major obstacle to educational attainment for foster children as if they are not identified, then the supports necessary may not be offered, or evaluated in any meaningful way leading to the present lack of relevant data that could be used to target further resource allocation to enable foster children close the educational attainment gap. That being the case then how then do teachers find out?

4.2 Theme 2 : Educational Supports for Teachers

4.2.1 Internal Processes and Procedures.

This research shows that it is a combination of formal procedures and informal skills that the individual teacher possesses to ascertain that there may be external factors that compromise a child's educational engagement. There were different formal and informal processes to finding When asked how they found out about the status of a foster child, there were numerous responses.

> obviously officially by the HSE (Health Service Executive) contacting us but we usually have an inkling way beforehand and this is where the teachers have a say. They are in constant contact with the child and they see the differences in mood and circumstance, neglect or whatever. We also get information from the (foster child's) peers hence it is important to be able to tap into those channels so we can adjust if necessary. …but officially the HSE would formally tell us when they can.(PO1).

> usually the social services initiate the contact but we have on occasion had to chase them to find out the circumstances of a particular student (PO3)

> This area tends to be an area that is parachuted in and there is a lot of social issues here. You have a blank canvas there is no file on any these students so that is why it is so important to have an education passport that they are talking about, it should be in and is essential so all that knowledge is accessible to all. Then you find the agencies that work back and I have to chase them. In one case I had to ring six times and when I got them they were wrong, they said there were 4 in the house when I knew there was five so there is a level ……they don't go outside their own boundaries but they expect us to (PO2)

Not all teachers and principals took the view of attributing responsibility to outside agencies. Instead, they commented on the tools and processes they had to identify if something was wrong with a child's environment. All the participants mentioned the informal processes in their schools that 'flag' when a child may be in trouble. They explained the hard and soft data that a school has, to 'catch' those weaker students.

> from a variety of sources, other teachers experience with the pupil, their peers in school, grade trends and other signals and sometimes outside

agencies would give us a heads up on some issues that may need to be addressed.....we are encouraged to talk to colleagues, (other teachers) to see if there are behaviour issues in other classes, or if the child has siblings in other classes (TO2).

They (social workers) are all very busy and in most cases under resourced hence there is just no time…However we have teachers meeting where a lot of issues can come up, the individual teachers can pick up a lot….in terms of how the child presents, hygiene issues, engagement, being withdrawn, all cues we know means something is going on, then we have the hard data like grade scores, attendance, punctuality and the like which give us an indication (PO2).

TO2 described the informal processes that exist in her school which include other teachers experiences. PO2 elaborated on the intuition that school professionals need to use to pick up on the cues that children with outside problems display. This intuition was complimented by the hard data collected on punctuality and attendance. All respondents mentioned the number of mechanisms they can use to see if people are performing poorly which may indicate trouble at home. They included awareness and timely status updates and continued school attendance which exposed the effectiveness of the school. In many cases this was through peers, the child themselves self - disclosure, the foster parents, other teachers, and the support services (*Tusla*). Hence there is acknowledgement that the school can help by introducing processes and procedures that enable dialogue, transparency and engagement with all vulnerable children including those in care. In a formal way a school also collates data that provides an academic attainment level of the students which may be mined to identify children at risk.

grade scores and attendance levels were an effective barometer of how students are engaging with the school and can be the first indication of issues that need to be addressed.(PO1)

There was also a role played by the school's culture and ethos in motivating teachers and recognizing their input in the various roles they occupied to engage and promote learning outcomes. Culture is a highly complex construct, and there is little agreement amongst management scholars and indeed, researchers in other disciplinary areas, as to what

constitutes this phenomenon and how it should be studied. Among the many definitions of culture, that which has been proffered by Singer (1998) is of particular interest.

> A pattern of learned, group-related perceptions – including both verbal and non-verbal language, attitudes, values, belief systems, disbelief systems, and behaviors – that is accepted and expected by an identity group is called a culture.(p.30)

This definition is important for several reasons. Firstly, it presents culture as something that is learned. Secondly, it argues that culture is based on perceptions, implying it is a subjective phenomenon. Thirdly, it suggests some components of culture, such as language, attitudes, values and behaviours, according to which cultures may be differentiated from each other. Lastly, by referring to an identity group, it implies that culture is a collective phenomenon. Barnett and Lee (2005) state that 'culture is a socially shared activity, and, therefore, a property of a group rather than an individual (p.276). The findings reflected the benefits of this collective culture in support, motivation, and vocation. This research found that teachers can be supported by the cultural ethos of the school and recognition of their endeavours by senior management.

> our school has a value system which is driven by the principal that every child matters, it sounds trite but at the end of a hard day, the sense is always there of why we do what we do, and it's collective, so it is a motivation and a benchmark we measure ourselves against…that's why we go beyond the boundaries of teaching, to support the child, whether that be a child in care or any other disadvantaged child, it what I do anyhow (T02)

> I think the Board of Management have a stake, the parents council have a stake, the teachers drive the core ethos, and this is managed by the principal, so the main driver is usually the line manager is the principal in my view. At the same time I can only suggest, it has to be taken up by the staff. ……I see my role as chiefly a facilitator and empoweree of the professional teaching staff here. Hopefully I allow them the space to take initiative and sell the principles that we uphold in our mission statement which is to cherish each child and educate them to be spiritual and compassionate and enable them to reach their full potential. (PO3).

The culture existent in schools has been identified by teachers and school principals as vital to the supporting and motivating the staff towards a common end , that of optimising

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children's educational outcomes ('we are all in this together'(TO1); 'it really is a vocation' (TO2) 'despite the frustrations ultimately we know the reason behind what we are doing and that comes from the top……there is comfort in that' (TO4). Teachers need support in particular to motivate them with the children who may be difficult, disengaged, weaker academically and who bring with them the baggage of their tumultuous lives to the classroom.

> A good question the board have a watching brief to ensure principles or ethos of the school is upheld, ….in my experience where it is owned is that it's in the hands of the staff and students, the shared experience, I believe it is a family and the big challenge here at -------------is to maintain that… We have a tight year head system which carries through and in theory then no one knows each student as well as their year head a teacher who is continuous and helps keep the small school feel (PO1)

> we are encouraged to share our experiences with particular children in the staffroom, where we may identify children at risk. (T03)

4.2.2 External Supports for School

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion is in operation since 2005 and is aimed at alleviating educational advantage. (*Department of Education and Science* (DES, 2005) A core element of DEIS is the known as the School Support Programme (SSP) which is in place in about six hundred primary and two hundred post-primary schools with the highest level of disadvantage.(Tusla, 2016)

DEIS schools are in receipt of additional resources to address educational disadvantage. These include a more favourable pupil-teacher ratio, funding, and assistance with school planning. As part of the SSP interventions such as the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), and the School Completion Programme (SCP), are available to each DEIS school. The schools that are involved in DEIS scheme can access a number of extra supports, but resources constraints have limited the access to inclusion in the DEIS framework. At present there are 800

schools in DEIS but another 257 are eligible but on a waiting list[28]. Hence it has its limitations, and this also effects the access to supports by foster children if they are not in a DEIS school.

> On the whole, I would say that we have all types of students here, many with challenging backgrounds. Also, we are a *DEIS* school so there are tracking mechanisms we make the most of to find out how a student is doing over time and how we may adapt to individual circumstances. However, we would like to do so much more like active interventions but again resources do not allow it (PO4)

> there are also external tools and mechanisms that facilitate learning for weaker students which includes foster students. The HSCLO that are operating in many schools, The School Completion Programme and the JCSP are a holistic range of supports that can benefit academically weaker students. The supports are there in an academic horizon, but the environment that a foster child inhabits is much wider than that (PO2)

> we are not a DEIS school but we have students suffering from neglect and disadvantage, and to be fair they deserve such supports….the criteria is a bit blunt(T03).

There is recognition that the access to supports for foster children in school is dependent upon whether the school itself is classed as operating in a predominantly disadvantage area, and highly dependent upon the resources available. Therefore it is essential that the resources that are there are used efficiently.

> Usually if there is a problem, we sort it out with the foster carer, we rarely go beyond that, having said that if the foster carer is not motivated then it can be hard to incentivize the foster child and so supports may be enacted (PO2)

> Yes, we have numerous external supports that can be accessed but we really need the support of whoever is the primary carer for the child, whether that be *Tusla* or the foster care, usually the foster carer, however we need them involved and this does not always happen, we don't have time to chase them.(PO1)

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[28] 800 schools currently benefit but 257 more a waiting list
https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/hundreds-of-disadvantaged-schools-excluded-from-deis-support-scheme-1.3324907 Irish Times (accessed March 2018).

'they (social workers) all want to get the foster children in to DEIS schools, since the supports are easy to access. (SO4)

Both hard and soft mechanisms of evaluations were recognized by all participants as being essential to manage this vulnerable group of children in care. The importance of optimizing educational outcomes is spelt out by O'Higgins *et al*.(2015) and Jackson & McParlin, (2006) who have indicated the more likelihood of children in care to be unemployed, have mental health problems, spend time in prison or psychiatric institutions or experience homelessness at some point in their lives. In Ireland the *Educational Welfare Service* has seen increase in their waiting times indicating an expanding service gap in this area to 1513 children in care on the waiting list. (*Tusla*, 2018) This reflects the increased requirement for educational supports for children in care.

4.3 Theme 3 Influences on a Foster Child.

In this theme the findings have identified issues around stability, the importance of peer and peer networks, and the school as the most powerful influences on the foster child. This corresponds to Moran et al. 2017 where they described three core factors which had the most significant impact on children and young people's sense of permanence stability in care: relationships: the child's relationships with their social workers or child care support system, relationships with the family of origin and their foster family; social support: the level and quality of support from social work teams and aftercare, support from family members (e.g. foster carers and family of origin) and other support systems; and communication: between social workers, members of the foster family, the family of origin and the young person. Underpinning these components is a strong interconnecting theme of the importance of the continuity of the placement and continuity of support for the young person in care. (Moran et al 2017, p.68)

4.3.1 School as an influence

Sociologists (Parsons 1951; Durkeim 1982 ;Wyness 2006; and Goodyear 2011) have all focused-on theories of developmentalism with a view to understanding the child. Wyness (2006, p.122) labels developmentalism as the 'ages and stages' model of childhood and argues that it has, for many, been the dominant theory and practice in studying and

researching children and childhood. It has also become the dominant approach through which children's pathways from childhood to adulthood are assessed. Elkin (1960) identified three major influences on the child; the family, the school and the peer group and believed the school to be a key socialising factor for children. However, it needed partnership with primary carers to benefit the child. The role of the school is to offer formal structures of regulations, and provides a stable, nurturing context with appropriate adults who represent authority (Elkin 1960). In this context, the respondents were uniformly positive in their understanding of the 'normative' role that the school plays in the lives of children in care.

> I see education as being extremely important for children in care, as you say ....If I can put it in two ways. Many children in care have had trauma, attachment difficulties and multiple placements in some small cases and education can act as a normative place, where every child goes and they can be just themselves, and also it can offer them opportunities to place themselves in the adult world that is different from where they come from (SO1)

> it's complicated but in my own experience we have maybe the most contact with the students so will be able to pick up on issues. Yes, we try to provide stability and be a constant in their lives…that's when we know. When we are told that is usually is some time before it comes to light. (PO2)

> the school yes, the only constants in their lives. Kids need routine that is what we provide some semblance of normalcy. at least that is what we strive for.(PO4)

The above comments are a mirror of the majority of interviews that have identified the positive role that a school can play in the lives of children undergoing trauma.

> I have relatively few foster children in this school however in England the one thing I observed was that the predictability and constancy in their life was of great solace. You cannot underestimate the turmoil feeling of rejection and how that plays out over time. In my experience their emotional needs were far more complex much more than your average child. What the school gave them was a sense of predictability which was massively important as it is for every child, it is a normalizing influence. I think the area where we as educators are challenged most is in the area of emotional support in part for children with low self-esteem (PO3)

However, Höjer *et al.*(2008) remarked that there is a need for greater examination of care systems and the remedial role that can be played by education. Several Sociologists (Durkeim 1982; Elkin 1960) did not view the family as the primary socialising agent, believing parents to be too particular to provide children with a more comprehensive, more universal moral framework. They believed the teacher was the key professional authority figure through which to socialise children and integrate them into socially ordered society. This again highlights the value of this research topic in looking at the educational trajectory through the lens of the 'adult' stakeholders.

> 'I also observe kids learn and are influenced by their peers so peers support is paramount. When bad things happen I always try and get the child d to come to school and avail of the support and the normalizing process which can be a massive buffer which is good….what is scary when there is detachment from the school.'(TO3)

> The foster parents and the school then would reaffirm and support that influence and also with the young adult where they come in here moaning, now it is good to have a moaning place, we all need that but to tell them how lucky they are etc. etc. schools can sometimes be that mediator… not in a conflict situation but when any child have issues we can affirm what is happening at home and allow the child space to vent.(PO2)

There were however criticisms and observations of the role of the school in the wider community.

> Many of the things that are important for a school are not as measurable as exam results. These are an easy measure. I would argue that their mental wellbeing, their health and personalities are increasing measurable outcomes not just the narrow exam bias which let's face only measures academic aptitude. Also, the grind culture also alienates and those who can afford to pay benefit at the expense of those who cannot. Unfair.(PO1).

> There is no vision for education apart from the Leaving Cert which is focused on regurgitation and it is an all or nothing game. The pressure is huge. Also, children are creatures of habit they also have too much choice. One of our roles to ensure children enjoy their youth …in a thoughtful way, so there is not the mad dash to adulthood or age inappropriate behaviour. I think there are a number of parents who are challenged in this regard (TO4).

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Some principals expanded on the role of schools embracing social capital in their overall learning role.

> Hence the key challenge is to bring them up principal led. I often joke that no child needs help to be more selfish. I'm keen on service activities, the old infirm, handicapped. Students at ---------are very fortunate and I make sure they realize that and the opportunities that come with that .Hence I want them to give something back, to contribute to the school (PO1).

According to Tusla (2018) there are 98% of children between the ages of 5 to 16 attending school in Ireland and 58% continuing in education after they reach the age of 18[29], which is an indication that the school is functioning as a 'normative' experience for the foster child. Jackson (1998) stated that

> Convincing children and young people that school is important should be a key task for social workers. Even young children can absorb this idea, but they also need to know why it matters so much, particularly in their situation. It is essential that everyone involved in the child's life gives the same message, especially foster carers and residential workers.(p.49).

Therefore the roles and responsibilities of all participants should be to support the school and education, in turn supporting the ethos of the school.

4.3.2 Peer group

One of the most influential groupings a developing child has is their peer group. Elkins (1960) notes that as an agent for socialisation, the informal nature of peer friendships allows for the exploration of a wider range of subjects while offering an experience of less authoritarian figures in their lives. The peer network should not be underestimated since children in care can become 'normalized' and not seen as different (this reflects the literature that evidentially expresses their desire not to be considered 'other' or different). Indeed, the fact that 'everyone has a story' allows foster children to be socially included.

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[29] The 58% figure represents those that opted for aftercare allowances with Tusla, it may not represent the population of care leavers since there is no national database.

In Moran *et al.* (2017) young people commented that they developed better relationships with social workers whom they saw as 'normal'. This is comparable to the international literature around matching, which shows that when the needs of the child and the expectations of foster carers and children are met, placements endure for longer. (Stott and Gustavsson, 2010) . The benefits of peer groups is evident in our findings. One of the Principals in an deprived area commented on the benefits of peers that can share the burden and offer their own stories to 'normalise' behaviour for the child in care who may otherwise present as 'other'. It lessens the impact and allows the foster child readjust their self- perception

> In our school we have so many stories, we have children with no parents no siblings and in a hostel, we had one child who the HSE left homeless for a couple of weeks then in a hostel with all the ancillary problems that went with that…. Using that as an example, the teachers would have known that …We all have problems so get on with it they know they are not the only one so we get past pupils who also come back and motivate the current crop. As I've said everyone has a story a foster child could stand out elsewhere like a sore thumb (PO2),

Another teacher commented on the danger of limiting the scope of the peer group, the theory being that with a wider circle of peer influences, horizons are broadened and opportunities for positive influences are enhanced.

> Yes peers are an influence but they don't really have the wisdom to be able to support the foster child's needs through neglect'(SO4).

> Well the students come from a wide range at our school but kids from foster care tend to keep company with not great peer group, this is where the foster parents come into play so if the kids in the yard are not playing with them the foster parents can sign up kids to outside organisations such as GAA(Gaelic Athletic Association) or Scouts can create different friends (TO4)

Price and Brew (1998) argue that foster children may exhibit certain behavioural patterns that tend to undermine their peer relationships such as social withdrawal and aggression, that they have peer relationships of a poorer quality compared to other children and young people and are therefore more likely to experience psychosocial and mental health problems (Price and Brew 1998, cited in Daly and Gilligan, 2013 p.8). This represents a

warning that thought must be given to the peer groups that children in care attach themselves to. It can aid or inhibit the foster child so should be managed pro-actively by foster carers and other stakeholders.

4.3.3 Supportive Relationships.

Again, the findings accentuate literature on the influence of appropriate adults on the foster child and a caring relationship to engineer trust and positive re-enforcement in the foster child.

> For a kid to feel they are cared for by a confident person instead of trotting to see that nice lady once a week, I'm not saying there is not a place for it but if a child is seeing it, in a residential unit one thing I use do I remember Sean McDermot street residential care which was really like a hostel where kids were very vulnerable. I would go and use a therapeutic hour to do maybe the family tree, such things like baby food and hot water bottles even a staff member reading a story actually recreating to allow them to come back to a place of trust so basic needs were being cared for it seems very simple but in doing work like that could be far more rewarding, than psychotherapy as ....yes in a year you may get results but not now that is far more immediate as I don't like this thing of push to the expert push it back push it back but people need support when they looking for counselling for child they probably need support for themselves (SO1)

> This girl was so damaged that she could not be with a foster parent what we were doing was this girl 18, she now needs to move and that was it ,we were asking her before leaving cert to leave the unit move out get a flat and do her exams, I asked are you mad (SO2)

In summary the influences on a foster child's educational attainment is varied which has been reflected in the findings. However, there is a corpus of literature on the subject For example, Jackson and McParlin, (2006); Emerson & Lovitt 2003, Brady and Gilligan 2018; O'Higgins et al 2017, Sebba et al 2015; Jackson and Martin 2002 have all identified the benefits of having a relationship with a 'trusted adult'. The connection between the teacher and student is crucial to meeting the needs of the foster child. (LaCour & McGlawn, 2015) and stability in placement is key and can contribute positively to educational outcomes (Biehal et al, 1995;Stein & Dixon, 2006; Welbourne & Leeson 2012**;** Roarty et al 2018) Other important influences were with peer groups (McMahon and Curtain, 2013)

> This child, she was going through a really rough period predating care, so every morning she would come into my office and there would be things like shoes she could wear and tights and things and we (administration staff in school) would make sure she ate something before her day began…. and we of course informed Tusla so she eventually moved into foster care, but she still came into us every morning' , so yes we pick up stuff. (PO2).

This principal recounted a story that described the un sought benefits of providing a supportive relationship for the foster child. A child in her school was presenting poorly with some indications of trouble at home; poor hygiene, withdrawn and disengaged. The principal set time and found a place which she stocked it with clean tights, toiletries and food for this child. Subsequent to raising her concerns with Tusla, the child entered care but for the rest of the school term still arrived at school early and visited the principal, even though there was no clothing needs, the relationship was important. The Principal in turn was pleased if surprised 'we think we know what is going on in their heads but really. Do we?' (PO2).

> It is testament to the school that we still have continuous attendance from children we deem to be in trouble, they still turn up day after day, you have to reflect on that and consider that it is both the constancy of school to shape their day as well and maybe more importantly, the relationships that are made in school with teachers and friends….we must be doing something right (PO1)

This principal reflected on the determination of foster children to continue attending school when everything else is falling apart. This was an insight into the importance of the relationships that existed with the school environment. It also reflects the positive sense of permanence that stability in school offers.

> Children are never impressed by anything apart from interaction … they judge teachers and other adults as in do these people know me, care about me and care what I have to say are they interested….visibly show interest and if people feel valued then they will do everything for you …if not well then, the perception is that they don't matter (PO4)

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This principal gave a concise description of the importance of interaction from the perspective of the child. In his view, children need to 'feel valued' and then reciprocate through engagement. The interview with the Guardian *ad litem* (SO4) took a firm view of the importance of positive adult role models in a child in care's life.

> if there was one thing I would stress, it would be the importance of relationships and those connections are vital in engineering change in a child in care, I have been working in this area for over thirty years and I am still surprised by the positive effect on a child in care if they can develop positive supportive relationships with appropriate adults, the results are amazing , more than any other influence(SO4).

4.4 Theme 4: Educational barriers for foster children.

4.4.1 Stability in Care and School.

There is a wealth of research devoted to the benefits of stability in a child's life. (Keogh *et al.* 2006, p.360) state that 'despite the many difficulties involved in maintaining children's regular school attendance, it is evident that school may represent the only stability for a child in an otherwise insecure and changing routine'.

> The teacher wants the child to succeed, the difference between a nurse and a teacher is that the teacher has a long-term relationship whereas the nurse has a fleeting interaction (TO2)

> If we know the children and we identify that they have problems we can provide emotional and practical support, but it depends on whether we see the signs , rarely are we told immediately, but once we are aware we bring it up in our child review meetings and let every staff member know, we want encourage the student in whatever way we can to see school as a 'normative' place, where they can just be themselves, separate to what is outside of their control…yes it's hard for them but our biggest worry is that we lose them, physically they may have to move , or they just dis-engage (PO3)

This has also been the focus of Welbourne et.al, 2012; Darmody, McMahon and Banks, 2013; McMahon and Curtain, 2013; and Roarty et.al 2018) The child requires a secure base to establish positive relationships, and this can be detrimentally affected by serial-

attachment experiences, whilst frequent changes of caregivers may be painful and anxiety-provoking for the child (Thompson, 1998; Schofield and Beek, 2005). Darmody et al (2013, p 29) also comments on the necessity of stability and the importance of the school as a constant force in the foster child's life:

> It depends on how secure their placement is and this of course has knock on effects in our relations with their guardian(s).one child , and I know it's rare , but she went from Billy to Jack to Jane all in the course of one school cycle, now she had issues but what hope had she being bounced like that…all I could offer was emotional support (PO3)

> In my view children who are in care should start school at 5, children who we work with are carrying a lot of stress in terms if a placement breakdown or if they come in to short term placements or if they have to move school so I would say that you could take it children in care change schools more often than normal children(SO2)

> Who provides most of the support and influence… I'd have to say the foster parents (that is if they are in long term care) and the school yes, the only constants in their lives. Kids need routine that is what we provide some semblance of normalcy. at least that is what we strive for. Also their peers …actually that depends on the age of the child (TO4).

> I would say again depending on age they stability with their foster parents, then the next influence is us as a school or their peers and then natural parents and then support services, that is in my view.(TO1)

These observations reflect the literature by Roarty *et al.* (2018) and Darmody *et al.* 2013) who have focused ion stability of placement and school as two pillars that support the emotional stability of the foster child. (2013, p 29) and have commented on the necessity of stability and the importance of the school as a constant force in the foster child's life.

> The research shows that it is not only the connection between the child and the foster family or parent that matters. Instead, the whole system surrounding the child must also be taken into account(Roarty *et al.* 2018,p.52).

In Ireland the stability of placement with foster children the key planks that Tusla use to demonstrate that the care system is working in Ireland. Research has shown that '44.8% of young people had been in care for more than 10 years. Therefore, a high percentage of young people had been in care for a relatively long period of time in their short lives'(Daly Gilligan 2013, p.ix). Emerson and Lovitt (2003) have argued that some are the reasons for poor academic performance around foster children is down to 'more school placements than non-foster children, hence missing out on extra-curricular activities, and peer groups. They also may not be evaluated academically' (p.200). Therefore, stability in school and permanence in placement are vital for educational opportunity. One of the social workers commented on how a student developed academically within one year after entering care with a stable foster family.

> No not a preconception but obviously the pupils are going to be distracted also I have encountered one case where the child was assumed to be dyspraxia with learning difficulties a foster child who did very well in her Drumcondras (a state test) the following year. This was down to just the involvement of a stable foster home with supportive foster parents(SO2).

> I would not expect hang on what am I saying ....I would expect kids in care to do overall better than some of the other kid s in area they have come from many ways but maybe not as well as others if a kid is in long term foster care id expect them to do pretty well but if their journey is much more broken they are not going to do so well (SO1)

4.4.2 Dis-engagement from School

These findings have identified that there is a different developmental level associated with gender (Zember and Blume 2009; Kingdon and Serbin, 2017), hence their experience is that gender does play a role in the educational outcomes for foster children.

> boys seem to disengage earlier than girls that's my experience, why, due to the level of aggression that comes in to play at age 14.My

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personal experience has been girls doing very well up to leaving cert then just fall away, I feel this is due to their placement may be coming to an end as reduced payments to foster carers could be a factor here, a new social worker /after care worker steps in here when this person should come in at 16 and work along with childs social worker in order to ease the childs vunerability .so number one is fear as these girls of which I have only had experience at this age are more worried about the roof over their head than school results and college places as their future is so unknown(S02).

girls engage longer but boys are easier to keep on track whereas girls once they have disengaged then that it is very hard to bring them back(TO1).

girls by and large tend to take responsibility, but again it depends on the peers fundamentally…not primarily the teachers. However when they opt out in my experience however we try it's very difficult to get them back on track .I am talking usually in Leaving year maybe it's the stress maybe it's the change in circumstance (PO2).

A number of teachers mentioned the change in circumstances that occur around the Leaving Certificate. This usually is around the age of 18 which is a crucial time for foster children. It is when their statutory care is over, however continuing education and where they is a defined 'need' the care status continues. But usually social workers change, placement may end, and this uncertainty is reflected in their educational attainment., as recognized by SO2.Welbourne et al (2012) noted that the age and timing of entry to the care system suggests some reasons why children in care may do so much worse educationally than their non-care peers (p, 131) Also, behavior issues can be more challenging depending on the age the children enter care. Literature attests that foster children may have experienced more negative experiences and may also display challenging behaviour, brought on by educational dis-engagement prior to entering care (Scherr 2007; OFSTED 2008; Allen and Vacca 2010; Emerson and Lovitt 2007; O'Higgins *et al.* (2015).

4.4.3 Expectations of success

Research in the United States have indicated that the expectations for children in care may be a lot less that for non-foster children according to Emerson and Lovitt (2003, p.200). Most worryingly, teachers can be insensitive to foster child's problems, perceive them as not too bright and are reluctant to spend much time on their needs. 'There is a tendency to underestimate children in care' (Jackson and McParlin, 2006) However these findings contradict this view or accurately accept that will be limitations and an attainment gap , but the teacher's remit is to encourage students to do their very best.

> but you have to realize that the students are under so much upheaval and trauma and I don't use that word lightly so yes, their concentration will slip and hence they may not have the support or space needed to learn, so yes it can be a problem obviously (TO4)

> I don't know, is stuff going on up higher, is it that horizons are made limited. So few go to third level it is rare ,very rarely happens few go to academic third level they go to beauty /childcare (SO3)

The foster child will be influenced either positively or negatively depending upon the expectations of those closest to them. This includes peers, foster parents, teachers and social workers, the primary agencies of socialization (Elkin, 1960) . The interviews posed one question on definitions of success for the foster child to interpret the expectations that the stakeholders had for the foster child in care.

> It is very hard it is very different for each child, its doing leaving for some junior cert for other stay in placement for some ….some it's not getting pregnant very different for every child ,we do hope to keep them in school as long as possible we look to keep them safe we look to return them home if possible ,we look to maintain a healthy relationship with birth family (SO2).

> Success comes in very different ways, there is academic success, emotional balance and sporting success etc. It really depends on the student but success either with foster children or others is to be best they can be…..in whichever field they choose. In relation to foster children

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I hope to keep them until leaving cert at least if not third level .Our mission is to deliver students that are emotionally stable, academically competent with a core religious ethos and morality so does that answer your question. (PO3)

In theory we try and see no matter what is happening in their lives . and here there is a lot happening in lots of children's lives. that they continue their education, that they still can manage to focus on their leaving cert , holding them and getting through, but the first step is care, their care needs have to be met firstly otherwise forget it they can't learn. (TO3)

Success is determined in context…it depends on the student for one it could be third level entry , for others it could be just staying on to do the Leaving cert and again for others just staying out of serious trouble with the authorities…..it's really hard to know (PO2)

Most of the findings in this research disagree that teachers underestimate the foster child. There are more likely to be aware of the specific barriers to the educational attainment of the foster child and hence will be motivated to seek out solutions to enable the best outcomes for children in care. Daly and Gilligan (2013) noted that 50% of Irish students in foster care obtain some educational supports (p.x). However there is not universal support.

Yes, in my experience teachers do take a view on children that are in care. They expect less, and that worries me, does that preclude them from opportunities in attainment, yes it does (SO4).

This view was an outlier within the major findings but considering that it was the opinion of a Guardian ad litem who has a boundary role in managing different stakeholders, it is significant. She went on to discuss the responsibilities that need to be placed on the child in care for their own learning

They (social workers) all want to be in a DEIS school for the supports, but there, in my experience they don't have the same expectations ….they don't stimulate them to their potential, in my view.(SO4).

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This is a very interesting opinion on the nature of offering linear supports that should fill a need. However, unless it is matched with a longer-term view of education, including the need to stimulate, provoke and challenge children academically then it is an opportunity lost. Brady and Dolan (2007) addressed the issue of supports

> evaluation can take on a different role depending on the needs of the agency. For example, "gotcha" evaluation can be used to justify the difficult decisions that need to be made about services, or evaluation may be used to "show off" the merits of services for political reasons. Furthermore, social research tends to be undertaken as a 'singular' function either focusing solely on an adversity, for example, drug misuse; domestic violence or on specific populations, such as, early years, adolescents or lone parents. As with the organization of child welfare services to date there tends to be compartmentalization of research and not enough 'cross factor' analysis.**(p.17)**

Therefore research needs to embrace the 'cross factor' analysis which is also represented by these findings.

Following on from the expectations of success are the expectations put upon the foster children to be responsible for their own success. The learning contract between the student and the teacher. It was illuminating to discover that there was a wide variety of opinion in our sample.

> My approach with my kids is I have given them responsibilities, I am here but it's up to you ,in terms of foster children we want kids to do well we keep in touch with schools so there is contact ,I do know if a child needs to be placed in a special school we link well and we have reasonable contact with schools so kids don't fall through the cracks'. (SO2)

> resilience has come up a lot lately in fact today I was nominated to go to a talk that is coming up ,so I think it is good, but for the child itself resilience such an all-encompassing term…they (the Foster children) have to take a lot of hits, moving to a new house, maybe neighborhood, maybe school .I think you need empathy…the children have a lot of change thrust upon them , and then they are added more change (SO3)

> Each student is unique with a unique ability so it's really subjective, no I don't think they should be responsible (TO3)

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yes, the same for any child, why should we expect less. It does not do them any favours, again each according to their ability(TO2).

International literature suggests that these foster children have suffered developmentally though neglect or maltreatment (Fisher et.al 2007, Kerig and Wener, 2006; Welbourne et.al. 2012, Daly and Gilligan 2013). Evidence suggests that they are at a disadvantage academically and emotionally. The foster child's well-being and emotional stability may be compounded or alleviated by how well the various stakeholders that are tasked with the educational remit of foster children work together. This is where we turn next.

4.5 Theme 5. Multiple Stakeholdership

International literature suggests that school systems and social service agencies need to improve their collaboration to support better the teachers of foster students and, thus, the outcomes for children living in foster care. (Zetlin et al, 2004, 2006; Allen & Vacca, 2010; Bruce et al, 2010; Pecora, 2012). Upon reviewing the transcribed interviews for responses regarding what experiences participants have had in dealing with multiple stakeholders, there was a sense of being ineffectual in navigating the various support services (TO2: 'chasing social services for information') (PO3: 'trick is to exclude them from school. temporally') (TO2: 'wrong information') (TO3: 'we tell them-should be the other way around') (SO3 : 'no joined-up thinking'). The 'joined up thinking' comment was used liberally throughout most of the interviews. However, admission and recognition quickly followed this that the services themselves are under-resourced across the board. We can assume then that the principals in this study believe it to be a resourcing issue.

> I have found that dealing with multiple agencies can be a nightmare it is so frustrating that the length of time between referral and treatment. I would use the GP route to get an urgent referral when needed. Also a little trick I picked up was if you temporarily exclude someone that the HSE or whoever must act the social services have a duty of care then to deal with the issue. I have had parents in my office crying in frustration in getting onto social services from anger management bereavement, the full range. We must invest in children'. (PO2)

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When the school is in the geographic area then we (teachers) and other students know some of the issues going on when quite often the agency responsible for the foster child is outside the area. Whereas even if they are in the area, they still may not be aware of what is going on and sometimes the issue is to do with relationships, mental health issues, because their peer network is in the school then they may come to us and say look we are concerned about so and so will you do something about it so it is all those things that feed into the school and the guardian whereas the outside agencies are not involved enough to know what the issues are. (PO3)

Dealing with social services I never cease to be amazed at the caseloads they work under and the pressures they have so it is a resource issue they work in very difficult conditions(PO4).

People involved in the care of children, and by that I mean social workers and teachers, they are motivated by the connections and relationships with the children, what they don't wish to be doing is filling forms, are we too highly regulated, yes and social workers are leaving in droves because of it (SO4)

However, as stated by SO1, it is not a money issue the author suspects that in the past unlimited resources has not helped institutions like the HSE for example. In this regard further research is strongly warranted to ascertain how additional resources may be used effectively. The accommodation that the school makes, is to engage in the student's own peer network, install mentoring programmes and tapping into teachers understanding of the students to offset and manage issues that are beyond the remit and professionalism of the staff. (TO4 'you cannot imagine the turmoil and feelings of rejection and how that plays out over time').

there was another child where we had to work with the foster parent where she would set boundaries and we would reinforce them and we would check together to see if that child was where she should .so we worked hand in hand with the guardian to get the child over the line through the Leaving Cert, now that was hard but ultimately worth it….it is our job (PO2)

One of the opinions was that children in residential care fare less well than those in foster care due to one principal's opinion that the looser structure in foster care supports the

child better than the more rules led residential care system. (PO3) Another observation was that in some school's foster children are not different in their turmoil than their non-foster peers 'every child has a story'(PO2) The point is that they can share their burden with others that have similar problems, which can be enabling to the foster child. However, it could also lead to a negative spiral , according to an experienced Guardian *ad litem*

> Children don't have the wisdom to be supportive sometimes, you need an adult for that, I always worry when I see some foster children's peer groups, some look for the other damaged souls and this can be very negative for them and their engagement. (in education) SO4

In this principal's experience, it is a positive to have numerous stories and challenges in a group which enables them to become mutually supportive.

> Just to be clear we are talking about Guardians, foster parents and children…when something goes wrong, it tends to be the school and the foster parent who will sort the issue out between them, muddle through and oftentimes with other agencies it is hard to access them or more in particular access the same person. Continuity of the person in the agencies is usually the problem; usually the school is always there...the constant (PO2)

(SO1) had an inside view on the stress points within Tusla that have led to staff attrition and the lack of national statistics and performance indicators to see how effective child service provision is in Ireland.

> we don't have enough social workers coming on board for the demand there is ....areas that had been closed down during recession for disability mental health primary care they are now hiring again and they look for grads with some experience they are not high-risk jobs in the sense that failure to do something would not in most cases lead to a poor outcome or indeed you are not scrutinised to the same extent ...you have more professional autonomy .... the amount of rigour and style of regulation I believe is driving people out of foster care and child protection work' (SO1)

> I think maybe it is a little defensive at times but they may be less if some of the positives were acknowledged instead of it always being a problem ,there is a huge problem in Tulsa at the moment about

> recruitment of social workers and they are not shouting loudly enough
> ....Tulsa managed to recruit 8 net social workers last year' (SO1)

Tusla and IFCA (2017) explored the relationships between foster carers and social workers. They found that where there was signs of mutual respect, there was a service gap in communication between the parties. Staffing was considered inadequate to meet demands and deliver the appropriate quality of care (Brady and Gilligan 2018; Tusla and IFSC,2017). The other factors that contributed to service gaps were the high thresholds to obtain supports (Laming 2009), This may lead to inefficiencies as explained by SO1,

> I think the other thing that happens and I can see why this happens if I was a principal social worker I have vacancies and I have a big waiting list of children ...and we know enough to see that someone needs to look deeper here ...so they have had their preliminary screening waiting initial assessment we have nearly 5000 in that category in the country and I had two social workers going into a family one a social worker and one a link worker on a stable placement. (SO1)

There were also examples of collaboration that is a positive expression of future intent on behalf of Tusla.

> I think Tulsa and the Irish foster Care Association would have their differences but would work very close together, different functions but working very co-operatively (SO2)

> You have a blank canvas. There is no file on any of these students so that's why it is so important to have an education passport that they are talking about. It should be in and is essential so all that knowledge is accessible to all. Then you find the agencies that work back and I have to chase them , in one case I had to ring six times and when I got them they were wrong , they said there were 4 in the house when I knew there was five so there is a level of inefficiency there(PO3).

There were also day to day boundary issues which should be straightforward but complicated by the numerous stakeholders, gaining consent for extracurricular activities and gaining exemptions from subjects:

It can be very frustrating , sometimes we spend a lot of time trying to get consent and we may need that from the natural mother for things like away trips etc., which can be hard to get, also Tusla sometimes do not connect or we can't reach them when needed. They often have inaccurate information and we need to explain in great detail of a student's circumstances….they should be telling us and not the other way around….so it can be trying for all concerned. However I have met some wonderful social workers so ultimately, I suspect again that the problem is resources…We usually end up dealing directly with the student as to their wellbeing which is not a perfect scenario but our concern for the child comes first … It also has the benefit of allowing the child a chance to air any issues in safe environment, we can act as counsellors in some parts. (PO1)

Social workers don't know how children learn teachers know they are the professionals. We don't have a teacher employed in all of *Tusla*.........some can't learn everything ,it's all about being referring to therapy or counselling and that can-do good work ....sometimes just let me be happy, normal, achieving and this can be healing in itself just to get on instead of oh I did not get the counselling ,as if that fixes all (SO1)

we have to pick up the pieces the amount of times I have had to chase authorities for a signature so a child can go on an outing or whatever it is ridiculous (TO2).

A child I had had an exemption from Irish due to a very poor drumcondra score when she first entered foster care, three years later, her score improved based on her stable placement and resource hours and she was told she was no longer exempt from Irish since the school, her mother or us, did not do the required paperwork, so we were left in a situation where this child was supposed to sit the Junior Certificate in Irish even though she was exempt for three years with the full knowledge of the DES (*Department of Education*)…it resolved itself eventually but only down to the foster parents chasing it up' (SO3)

This indicates that it may be fruitful to investigate whether there should be cross institution sharing of expertise, collaboration on stress points that impact on the teacher's (primarily) role in educating foster children. Brady and Dolan (2007) ten years ago referenced the preponderance of information silos that existed in the Irish child services sector and it is still evident today.

We would like very normative things like where they [foster children] are placed but also maybe using PPS numbers like can we engage the Department of Education to see how children in care have performed in Junior Cert and Leaving Cert if we give them the numbers and measure against the non-foster cohort....now we are only exploring this ....the data commissioner may have reservations...we are working towards highlighting education as a core component of foster care.(SO1) .

4.5.1 School Teacher's lack of Agency.

Whereas there has been research carried out on the lack of agency for foster children (Vacca 2008; Brodie, 2000), there is also a lack of literature on the agency of teachers in their interactions with multiple stakeholders. This research identified a perceived lack of agency on behalf of school principals and teachers, particularly in relation to the vulnerabilities of children in their care as identified by a number of responses.

I know I had meeting with other teachers informally where we discuss certain students usually at risk of behaviour disorder or coming to school unprepared dirty or whatever, this knowledge would feed to the principal but from there I never knew what happened Did they act on the information I don't know but for a fact we knew long before any support services were involved who was vulnerable (TO2)

I have encountered all of societies issues and yes it can be frustrating when you know the child is keen, and the parents for whatever reason do not trust , do not care, just do not engage with the school. Now most times I am talking about second cycle unemployment where apathy prevails and usually drugs and drink also is a factor. What chance do these kids have …when I first took up this role I spent a lot of time on to support services but I never felt I was helping …or to be more correct I never felt effectual ….in fact I always felt a hindrance and … I rarely had much support. Vocal support from my colleagues but that is as far as it went (PO1)

Firstly in my experience and I was never a principal, always a teacher with the role of home support…. No I don't think it is rare, and I am not thinking just about foster children here, there were many circumstances of disadvantage, neglect apathy, one parent, and no parent families the list goes on. But it was hugely frustrating, for starters

in our school we would amongst the staff and principal pick what students needed support. We need to tell services (*Tusla*) if a child is absent for more than 20 days but it appears not so the other way(TO3).

A parallel view defending this lack of dialogue is offered by social workers, considering the burden of work on all stakeholders.

I don't know, I was focused on the residential…. I think we place a very high value on education in this country by parents and teachers who zone in on this I know from a social worker standpoint, you may be dealing with 15/20 kids in care when in fact that teacher may only ever have one, its unusual enough so they would have interest.' (SO1)

If I could go back to the idea that social workers are at fault for not being focused on education and I say at fault in the broader sense because social workers are focussed on the placement, trauma, the abuse it's about connecting with relatives it's about going to court its finding a place, life story books and file and HIQA and all those things...... and one of the things on a long check list is get the child into school, once the child is there is relief! ....but I think the education should be much more highlighted there if there is an on-going care plan'(SO1).

There is very little research being done on the agency that teachers have in their management of foster children with multiple stakeholder issues and the lack of agency that teachers feel is borne out in all the interviews.

4.6 Theme 6. Key Resourcing Issues.

When questioning the professional landscape of informed interviewees, there is always a necessary platform in the interview schedule for what can be improved, and this research was no exception. Whereas I wished to avoid the narrative of just focusing on problems, there were a number of key areas that the interviewees had an opinion on to enable them to effectively manage the remit broadening the opportunities for children in care through educational attainment and these are presented here. For example, 'better management is needed for admin for social workers, since the private sector better resourced' (SO3). This is in relation to the number of private fostering firms that are operating in Ireland to take up the strain of and are costing a lot more to fund than the in-house service in *Tusla*.

> I have said I want to see a lead in education in every region for children in care as I would like to see for health, so someone there who is chasing social workers have they got their vaccine have they got their injections , medical records all of that…also here's my concern I think there should be a teacher lead alongside a social worker so this I feel would work better (SO1)

Another Principal was vocal about the problems that need to be addressed mentioning the lack of accurate and timely data, staff attrition in *Tusla*, overloading in the curriculum,

> however I believe the Dept. of Education don't wish to fund the private sector at all, they are constantly refining and analysing our processes really, I suspect so they can stop funding us ….and the HSE is a mess, to deal with anyway, it is at the luck of the draw that you deal with someone one who is capable and two knows the story has access to the files etc. of your charge. Lastly there is never enough time to dialogue with children outside of the curriculum . it is a full day for both students and staff so we need to find the time to engage with all our students so that is hard so we may miss stuff, we try not to but I'm sure it happens.(PO4)

> Training should be provided for teachers in college and CPD courses should be provided too. In my experience, even as HSCL teacher, I have received neither. (TO3)

There was support from teachers and principals for the need for professionals to cope with the emotional challenges that children face in today's society.

> If you told me 20 years ago that kids would be depressed, I would have laughed at you, but it's a fact, we don't know what's going on in their out of school life, but we see the signs, children are under so much pressure today and without the skills or. resilience to deal with the various influences that affect them day to day, so the greatest need is to look after their mental health, without that we have no chance to engage them and it's more prevalent now than ever before (PO1)

> I really think there is a need for a fully trained psychotherapist to support the children in school, we just are not qualified to deal with what being thrown at the kids. (TO4).

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All respondents were well informed and had a checklist of recommendations sought. Some teachers indicated the need for additional training and the problems of managing the external supports that are available such were the demands on their time.

> Despite receiving no training in the area, foster children are supported very well in our school because we are lucky enough to have a HSCL teacher. Having held this role in the past, I have a deeper understanding of the supports needed. All teachers should be able to access training in this area. (TO1)

> I have worked in a DEIS 1 school since 2001 where my roles have included HSCL teacher, class teacher and Special Educational Needs (SEN) teacher. I have met many foster children and their families during this time….even though I was skilled, I could not manage the demands and the supports were not there. (TO3)

This indicated a continuous recognition of the weaknesses in the system with most participants having a checklist. The main points are as follows; the need for increased collaboration between the various stakeholders; recognition and additional support for teachers in their various roles in educating foster children, which includes a psychotherapist who can help foster children navigate the consequences of neglect and attachment disorders that hinder their educational attainment. Social workers had a similar vision , particularly in collaboration and the need for efficient nationwide data gathering techniques. They also identified inefficiencies in the allocation of work with resources (social workers) lost to stable placements while the waiting lists for link workers grew longer.

4.7 Chapter Summary

This study has yielded a rich body of qualitative data from which research findings have been identified and are presented in the chapter. The interviews were presented and analysed under the themes explained in the previous chapter.
In summary the findings included:

The stautory body *Tusla* had a myraid of influences that affect decision thinking. Primary research found that the educational remit for the foster child may be one of many competing influences. For example there are too many decisions facing foster children at leaving cert year which impacts on their performance at this critical time (changing of care staus, change in care personnel and potential change in foster care due to the foster child reaching the age of 18);

The relationship between the foster child and teacher was more akin to that of a counseller and client rather than a teacher and student.

It is necessary to improve collaboration between the various stakeholders. Competition for resources is high leading to a cracks in the system of care and decisions on the well being of the child is highly conditional on the resources available.

Apart from a recognised 'duty of care' teachers and social workers appear 'overwhelmed' and 'unrecognised to the amount of effort they make in seeking the best outcomes for the foster child, whether that be a safe placement of educational attainment. However that should be recognised as not mutually exclusive.

There is support from teaching personnel for psychotherapists in schools to support and bolster the emotional well-being of children at risk. There is across the board recognition that children may have many more adverse influences in their lives outside of school than ever before that affect their mental well-being and their opportunities to educational progress. It would alleviate the burden on teachers.

Ultimately the findings suggest that providing solutions to the attainment gap is more complex than just cause effect solutions. Welbourne *et al*.(2012) articulated this complexity and it has value in repeating here

> A careful analysis of the evidence available relating to the attainment
> of looked after children suggests a more complex picture. Achievement
> by looked after children may be greater than has been suggested
> (Forrester, 2008; Gaskell, 2010, Harker et al., 2004a; Heath et al.,
> 1994), and where they have poorer outcomes, the reasons for this appear
> to include a range of individual and contextual influences that need to
> be understood and addressed if children in care are to have similar

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opportunities for educational success as their peers, and therefore, similar lifelong opportunity(p.128).

This reflects the findings in that it is hard to find linear cause effect solutions give the multitude of influences. On this point Brady and Dolan (2007) offers a perspective that may explain the shortcomings in developing sustainable solutions to offset the consequences of neglect and allow more successful outcomes in education

> Just as children and families who experience difficulty have problems which do not occur in isolation, so also the intervention to assist them does not occur in isolation. There are many facets and factors which contribute to best practice in such contexts ranging from skill and commitment of professionals to availability and adequacy of service provision, to name only some. As such it would be very difficult for any such research to identify a panacea in terms of service provision simply because it is more than reasonable to suggest such a 'utopia' of service or intervention does not exist (Brady and Dolan, 2007, pp.18-19)

With that perspective in mind, the findings indicate that it is essential to manage stakeholder relationships more effectively to motivate the various participants, thus benefitting the foster child's educational journey. The second priority should be in addressing the information silos that exist within the institutions and manage them more efficiently. The third priority of in the promotion of positive influences on foster children that have been identified in the literature and accentuated in the findings. The next requirement is to consider individual education plans for foster children and considering the external supports that exist for children at risk in their educational outcomes. The next chapter shall discuss the findings in some detail triangulating the findings with previous research and placing it in an Irish context. This will be followed by a series of recommendations based upon the discussion. The final section shall include the limitations, contribution to knowledge and the conclusion.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

> 'a huge chasm often separates data from conclusions'.
> (Eisenhardt, 2002, p.17)

The purpose of this discussion is to interweave the strands of literature with the research findings to add to the corpus of literature on the subject of optimizing educational attainment for foster children and also add to the literature by contextualizing the argument in an Irish context. The interpretations are plausible and complements the knowledge of the subject through new theoretical or practical interpretations (Coˆtˊe & Turgeon, 2005,cited in Nowell et al, p 11). With this approach this chapter shall discuss the main findings by referring to the literature to consider recommendations to propel further research in this area, and where achievable to offer actionable solutions. This chapter recalls the themes within the literature review and aligns them with the research evidence and my own personal reflections

The findings are framed within Bronfenbrenner's conceptual framework introduced in Chapter 1, by describing the complexity of factors that influence the ability of the foster child to manage their particular education journey. It provided an inter- elated system of ecologies to explain the various influences on a foster child's ability to respond to the challenges that shape their environment. Bronfenbrenner's well-recognised systems framework can offer direction not only in mapping the complex set of factors that impact on an individual situation but also in giving insight into how best to intervene and interact to produce best outcomes. The ecological model presents the interactions between the stakeholders and the foster child, (areas of stability, permanence and positive role models), while also illustrating the importance of the lateral connections in the meso system between the stakeholders that have a direct influence (relationships between the various stakeholders and the level of collaboration that exists) . It incorporates the factors in the exosystem that also have an indirect bearing (resource constraints, staff attrition, information silos). The chrono level indicates that the interactions between the systems and the experience and actuality of stability for young people continually change over time. Each permanence and stability mapping for a child should be conceptualised as one 'moment' which is subject to change and evolution

This research has highlighted the need for effective management of the complex issue of interactions and relations between the micro, macro, meso, exo and chronosystem that affect the educational development of the child in care. This research also points to the potentially transformative role of social workers and support workers, and how changes in the wider exo and macro system can potentially improve outcomes for young people and children in their unique micro and mesosystems. (Moran et al. 2017, p.13) The findings are discussed with this proposition in mind, mapping the various influences that affect the educational trajectory through Brofenbrenner's multi-relationship socio-ecological model.

Section 1 emphasises the concept of stability in school and the supportive teacher and peer relationships   that are in the microenvironment that are necessary to develop to promote resilience and self-esteem in foster children to combat the consequences of neglect that pre-date care incorporating the challenges that foster children face by being in care. Section 2 describes the external supports that are available in Ireland indicating the stress points in reaching the targeted clients and what measures are necessary to be more accessible for foster children who are not in a recognized disadvantaged area. Section 3 concentrates on the issues that arise from the multiple participants who are tasked with the education needs of foster children, the hierarchical nature of the relationships and how they may lead to a lack of agency in the stakeholders, and solutions. Section 4 considers the presence of information silos that impact among on interventions, extra administration and its negative impact on staff morale leading to lack of key personnel. It consider ways in which these soft and hard data silos can be managed more effectively for better service provisions. It also considers the time frame of supports that may impede timely interventions The final section (section 5) reflects on the significant contribution to knowledge, the limitations and the conclusion of the report.

5.2 Process Person Context Time (PPCT) framework

The first set of influences on the foster child are the personal traits and genetic disposition that are the building blocks that motivate successful management of the various ecologies towards successful educational outcomes. The findings coupled with previous literature reveal that these traits are shaped by a number of factors, development theories of socialization and attachment. (Fisher et al., 2007; Meloy and Phillips, 2012). The

explanation is that the foster child's academic ability, motivation and educational engagement is heavily influenced by the trauma that pre-dates care through family breakdown and the consequences of neglect. The research also identified the positive remedial factors that play a part in positive re-enforcement through the microsystem which includes, supportive relationships with peers, school and appropriate adults (teachers, social workers and foster parents), coupled with stability in placement and school. Previous research by Brady and Gilligan 2018, O'Higgins et al 2017, Sebba et al 2015, and Jackson and Martin 2002, have all identified the benefits of having a relationship with a 'trusted adult', within or without the care system to allow them 'feel valued'. However, stable placements are unlikely to be enough to help most children overcome educational difficulties, even with additional support in school. (Welbourne et al 2012,p.137) Sonia Jackson in 1998 encouraged a widening of the child in care's social circle, to provide a wider horizon to offer alternative models of family life and relationships. (Jackson 1998,p.49).

This report has a number of recommendations that are based on a thorough review of the literature internationally and in Ireland and the perceptions of teachers and social workers at the sharp end of educating foster children, which emerged though the primary research undertaken in this report.

This report advocates the importance of 'appropriate adults' to compensate for the fractured relationships that children in care have experienced. Hence it is vital to expand the foster child's peer group to expose them to many positive role models inside and outside school to broaden their horizons as to what is achievable, and motive positive engagement in their own educational outcome.

Recommendation 1. Widen Peer Groups of appropriate adults.

Direct resources to widening the peer groups that foster children inhabit by enabling schools implement extra-curricular activities, to expose foster children to more positive role models in and out of school.

This research has found that the benefits of relationships with mentors, appropriate adults and positive role models has a positive influence on a child in care. LaCour et al. (2016)

opined that the positive impact on behaviour can lead to the foster child developing the skills necessary to engage in positive interactions with others and developing a positive classroom environment offers foster children an even greater opportunity to succeed. Peers are one of the bedrocks of a child's development. Hence it is vital to encourage this grouping in a formal manner to assist in identification and to facilitate early warning signs of problems outside school that would affect the foster child' educational engagement. Jackson and Cameron (2012) in a wide-ranging European study of adults who had left care concluded that

> foster care seemed to lead to better promotion of educational attainment, and that young people who were most successful in formal education had engaged to a greater extent in leisure/culture activities, providing opportunities for informal learning (e.g. via hobbies, volunteering, extracurricular activities). The barriers were the lack of joined up thinking between social services and education, lack of teacher support, low expectations from social workers, and mental health issues (Jackson and Cameron, 2012, p.1108)

Recommendation 2. Formalise a Mentoring System.

Promote a formal mentoring system in all schools, to dialogue with teachers on classroom issues. This may structure the ad-hoc informal processes that exist in schools identified in this research, to identify children at risk.

The other key motivators in a foster child's personal armory to combat the challenges they face are concepts of self-esteem and resilience. McSherry et al (2006, p.57) noted the lack of self esteem and self concept that existed in children in care citing Ackerman and Dozier, 2005; Gil and Bogart, 1982; and Hicks and Nixon, 1989). Denenberg (2016) connected the concept of permanence with self-esteem citing sociologist June Thoburn's study on permanency and identity. Figure 26 illustrates the deep connections between permanence in placement and school and issues of identity to develop robust self-identity and self-esteem. Thoburn recognized the large influence stability had on a child's development. The benefits of permanence in relationships, placement. And schools are a sense of security and belonging, in a secure family unit, feeling loved and having the agency to love in return. Thoburn is emphatic that it is the 'sense of permanence which is crucial' (Thoburn 1994). She also emphasizes the need for children in care to maintain

some connection with their past, an appropriate adult that may allow them to connect their former life with the life in foster care. In this way foster children may place they're their life per-care with the care experience and allow a positive way forward for the foster child through self-identity and thus, self-esteem.

> No doubt legal standing plays some part in providing a degree of security with which the sense of permanency can first be established. Time too must play some part if, as the linkage to permanency indicates, identity formation is a continuing process. The model is, however, a picture of related emotional states and mental activities and leads to a valued disposition, self – esteem (p.37)
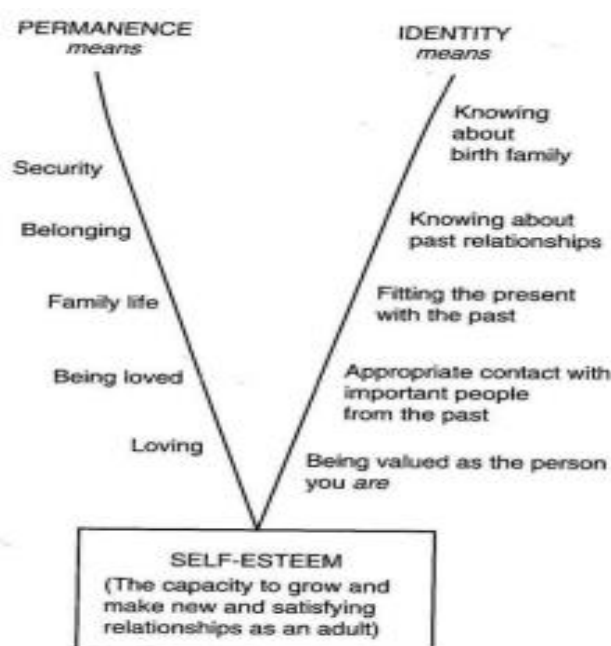

Figure 27: Thoburn's model of permanence.

Source : Thorburn 1994 cited in Denenberg (2016, p 49)

Resilience is described as 'normal development under difficult circumstances' (Fonaghy et al., 1994). A number of factors have been highlighted to support resilience. Successful engagement in education is one of them (Jackson, 2003, Gilligan, 2000), as is having a supportive and interested adult (Gilligan, 2000). These factors are known as protective factors. Happer et al. (2006) identified five common themes that appeared critical to their success; having people who care about you, experiencing stability, being given high

expectations, receiving support and encouragement and being able to participate and achieve goals. Luke and Coyne (2008) indicated that foster carers strike a balance between responding to a child's emotional needs and promoting age-appropriate social and academic skills. It is reasonable to suggest that the absence of this guiding influence has serious implications for the educational development of foster children which challenges the educators to compensate and make up for this lack of guidance. There appears not to be definitive views on the foster parents influence in this regard hence it is assumed that the school is primarily fundamentally tasked with dealing with the issue. This reflects the burden that teachers and school principals experience in dealing with the wider issues that obstruct educational engagement beyond their professional competence.

The research findings in this study have shown the necessity of addressing the influences that affect the socialization of the child in care. The stakeholders in a collaborative way have within their power to acknowledge and accentuate positive influences to benefit the foster child This scaffolding is key to facilitating agency in the foster child and while firmly placed within Bronfenbrenner's PPCT ecology, the personal traits of resilience and self-esteem that are affected by positive re-enforcement are judged by this research to be the basic building blocks to nurture educational engagement in school and therefore optimizing educational outcomes.

Recommendation 3. Recruitment of Psychotherapist.

Conduct a value for money (VFM) audit on the recruitment of professional psycho therapists in schools.

There has been a lot of advocates in this research for the role of a professional psychotherapist in schools to cope with children trying to manage the various challenges of self-identity and self-esteem. Technology has been a pervasive force in children's lives, with leaning and social benefits, but also dangers that children are exposed to online; of bullying, intense peer influences, and perhaps a discordant view of the world through the virtual lens. Our teachers mentioned depression in teens ad pre-teens as being on the increase. However, again not all are in agreement. . Two of the social workers thought that it may become another linear solution to complex problems that children in care endure. One was very concerned about the age when these children should be able to

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access a counsellor/ psychotherapist. She thought if the child was too young it may result in a lack of agency where the child may become dependent on some external solution to their problems advanced by the professional. However, for teens, all were in agreement. However, the value for money audit should be conducted to compare against other recommendations in climate of resource restraints.

5.3 External Teaching Supports

Stakeholders tasked with the educational remit of the foster child should work in concert to benefit efficient educational outcomes for the foster child. The interrelatedness is underpinned by the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme which operates in various countries, including Ireland. The thrust of the scheme is preventative. Therefore, it seeks to promote and develop real partnership between parents, teachers and communities, in order to enhance pupils' outcomes and learning opportunities, through improved attendance, participation and retention in the education system. (Smyth 2017)

The main route through which schools are provided with additional supports is through the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools programme which aims to combat educational disadvantage, through a range of interventions and strategies,and are designed to improve educational outcomes for children. (Loftus 2017, p5). Smyth *et al.* (2015, p.x) stated that 'research indicates that a significant proportion of children and young people from semi/unskilled and non-employed backgrounds attend non-DEIS schools. It is a 'bottom up' approach with the range of supports depending on local needs while 'the identification of schools for inclusion in the DEIS programme for example is based not on an analysis of disadvantage at student level, but on reports submitted by school principals on the level of disadvantage in their school population' (Loftus 2017, p.9), indicating subjectivity, not transparency.

However, the policies at national level may appear disjointed, .according to Brady and Gilligan (2018, p.34), arguing that in 'the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019 (Department of Education, 2015) there is no specific mention of children in care, in spite of their being in the care of the State and being identified internationally as having poorer educational outcomes than their majority population peers'.(p.34). The School Completion Programme and the Home School Liaison

Programme can account for what Smyth et al. (2015) called the 'multiplier effect' of holistic supports, but again is hampered by the the lack of the right kind of data on the social profile of individual students makes it difficult to measure the achievement gap specifically for disadvantaged students, and to capture the additional effect of the concentration of disadvantage in a school on achievement (the so-called 'multiplier effect').

Nevertheless, research attests to the positive values of these extra supports. Byrne (2016) used longitudinal data from Wave 1 and Wave 2 of the Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) child cohort study, examining the the factors associated with participation in non-parental after-school care in middle childhood where the findings show that participation in the type of after-school clubs captured by the GUI data (largely paid care in a group setting) is supporting children with specific educational needs (p.543) 'In comparative perspective, Ireland fares very poorly compared to other European countries in the provision of state-supported after-school childcare'. (Byrne 2016, p.546)
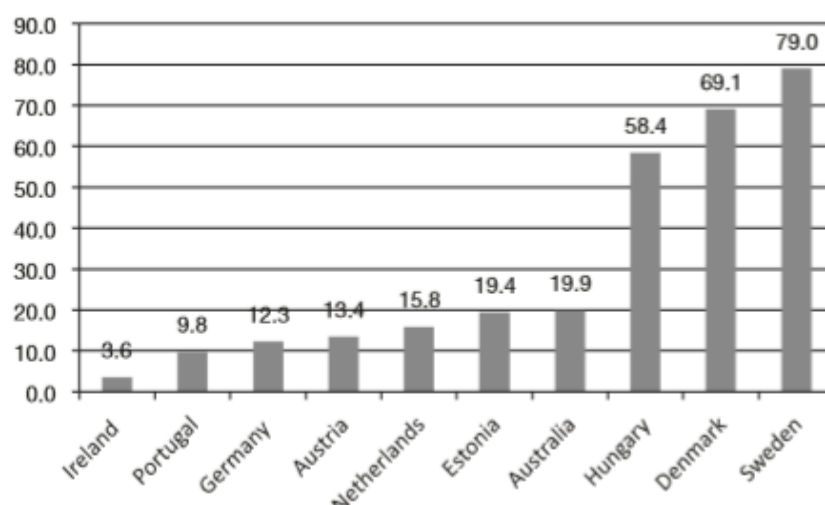

Figure 28: Percentage of Children Aged 9 Enrolled in Out-of-School-Hours

(State Provided) Care Services 2011

Source: OECD Family Database, Data for Ireland based on GUI using a different

definition. (Byrne 2016,p.547).

However, this research has found universal support for the various external supports. For education, to be effective teachers need a 'buy in' from the students and their guardians

and this can be complicated in the case of foster children with the range of stakeholders that exist. Since teachers are central to the operation of these supports, it is important to stress that the need for considering perceptions of teachers and their role is critical since before any proposal of change in perspective in dealing with the challenges in educating foster children.

The teaching profession is being shaped by the contemporary demands of each society (Stamelos, 2001). An increasing recognition of the needs of a diverse pupil population is such a contemporary demand. The ongoing challenge is to take account the complexity of the nature of their learning as well as how they can accommodate the difference in their classrooms. Professional educators will manage to do this by including all children (Nutbrown, 1996 cited in Clough and Nutbrown, 2003), accounting for differentiation in in children's abilities, aptitudes and needs Therefore, what is clear from the research is that learning is an interactive process. Therefore, success is reliant upon both within child, social and environmental factors. Indeed, the school itself is regarded as a constant in the turbulent lives of those at the margins

Recommendation 4. Adopt Individual Education Plans.

Adopt the recommendation by Daly and Gilligan (2013) for individual education plans for foster children. There should be a Value for Money (VFM) assessment of the benefit of individual education plans.

This research further argues that where there are multiple educational supports in DEIS schools, foster children as a cohort are more widely spread and may not easily avail of these supports without a concerted effort from over worked social workers to request resourcing hours and additional supports for a child in care..

Recommendation 5. Adopt a traffic light system for education in the action plans.

Every foster child entering care should have a care plan that provides the structure to their care (*Tusla*, 2018) Develop the care plan that should be in place for every foster child 93% foster children have a care plan (Tusla,2015) with a section just devoted to the educational journey with signals that shown green, amber and red, depending on

educational criteria collected from the various hard and soft data sets that the multiple stakeholders possess.

5.4 Solutions to Multiple Stakeholder Issues

One of the major findings in this study was that teachers and social workers do not engage effectively for the benefit of the foster child. These lateral connections have identified as essential for the efficient management of foster children, and the source of much frustration for teaching personnel.

Connecting the research from Stevens (2014) Zetlin *et al* (2004, 2006); Allen and Vacca (2010); Bruce *et al.* (2010);and Pecora (2012), with the findings in this report provoke recommendation 6, 7, and 8. The key challenges are to improve organisational and personnel collaboration, sharing of timely information and equal agency between all the stakeholders to promote mutual recognition and collegiality with the focus centred on optimising the educational outcomes for foster children.

Recommendation 6. Establish a platform for cross colloboration.

There needs to be a platform for cross collaboration between stakeholders such as Tusla, foster child advocates, and teachers to meet quarterly as a consultative board to develop bi-partisanship, recognition of each role and to consider 'best practice' to identify stress points in the lateral connections and provide agency to each party to foster a culture of unity, where objectives are developed and action plans are drawn up for the next quarter, and individuals tasked to operationalize the objectives.

Recommendation 7. Research power imbalance in stakeholder relationships.

Further research is needed in the area of stakeholder management on how the hierarchy of responsibilities can exist while also empowering and recognizing the input of the various stakeholders.

Recommendation 8. Recruit a Boundary Manager.

The research recommends a boundary manager in schools to be dedicated to the multiple challenges that affect children in care and their educational needs.

This could be from either the profession of social work , or teachers, tasked to be an educational equivalent of a guardian ad litem responsible for accessing educational supports for children in care. These should work independently and could be tasked for a number of schools due to the relatively small numbers of foster children that populate most schools in Ireland. Again, they could link in with the cross-agency mechanisms outlined in recommendation 1.

With technology teachers can provide remote access to the learning experience of the child. Blanchard (1998) points out that technology can serve the family-school connection in four ways, communication and information, learning and instruction, interest and motivation and resources and cost. This research has shown that it is vital that schools and foster parents work together in supporting students. Technology may have an important role to play in linking teachers, students and parents in a timely manner to identify problems earlier and manage their education more effectively

Recommendation 9.   Optimise technology to facilitate communication between stakeholders in a timely manner.

Consideration should be given to developing a software application that can be shared and ring fenced between the various stakeholders to facilitate updates, and opinions in a timely manner between the stakeholders, based upon the stakeholder's direct interaction with the foster child.

Monitored by the link worker attached to the foster child , it will allow agency between the various participants to voice opinions which is then on record. The benefits would be a compilation of timely data which could preclude a lot of meetings between the foster parent and the care services providers while also allowing timely interventions when necessary. A foster child may have a number of challenges that may predate care and evidence itself in a number of ways. This tool would offer a way to triangulate the cues and chronicle the performance of a foster child in their education and general well-being. This would then provide a recognisable benchmark with all stakeholders involved to

ascertain stress points in the learning trajectory. This can then be adopted by Tusla, the ultimate stakeholder to create a database of blended insights from all the various stakeholders to evaluate the care system in context to inform policy and transparently identify stress points in the learning trajectory due to the influence of multiple stakeholderships in the foster child's learning remit.

5.5 Information Silos and Timely Interventions

Brady and Dolan (2007) reflected on good practice in child services agencies ten years ago and referred to the preponderance on information silos in the Irish child services sector.

> To use an analogy from the medical world - if somebody had developed a cure for a disease, it would be considered a crime for it not to be shared – yet, within an Irish context at least a mechanism for practitioner sharing does not exist in child and family services'(Brady and Dolan 2007, p.23).

Much of the data which is available in Ireland is often for different regions of the country rather than from a national database. This matter was commented upon by *The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Child Abuse Implementation Plan* (2009), which noted that data is often collected for local management purposes rather than for ascertaining a nationwide perspective of critical matters in child care

Brown and Ward (2013) undertook a study on how maltreated children are dealt with in the UK judicial system and found the timeframe of assessment of the child in care's needs were dependent upon the court system in the United Kingdom and the local authorities which led to considerable delays.

They further explained that in the UK, care proceeding takes on average a year to complete, and the factors that contributed were resource issues; parents and foster care assessments; repeated assessments of birth parents; balancing birth parent's rights and children's rights; and professional focus due to the time frame of proceedings. In summary they concluded that,

> Delayed decisions mean that children experience the cumulative jeopardy of lengthy exposure to abuse and neglect; disruption of attachments with temporary carers; unstable placements at home or in care; and prolonged uncertainty about their future. There is a relatively short window of opportunity in which decisive actions should be taken to ensure that children at risk of future harm are adequately safeguarded. Delays close off those opportunities' (Brown and Ward 2013, p. 78).

This has resonance in Ireland, since we have similar legislative proceedings and without further research we cannot ascertain what obstacles it effects the educational attainment of foster children. However, a 2017 report by Ireland's Special Rapporteur for Child Protection Dr Geoffrey Shannon[30] on exercise of the Emergency Powers Act, citing delays in Tusla's handling of several child care cases. *The Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children* (ISPCC) welcomed the report stating,

> This is a report of enormous significance and urgent action is needed. The report describes a "persistent perception among a number of Garda respondents, that *Tusla* social workers sometimes delay addressing a particular risk to a child, in order to force the involvement of An Garda Síochána in the case due to the organisation's 24-hour operational basis. (ISPCC, 2017)[31]

This research has found that information silos are still present today . These do not just affect the statutory body Tusla, but also independent schools have their own silos and informal data gathering procedures that may also inform 'best practice ' in both the management and educational care of foster children. There is value in exploring ways in which these silos can be linked between schools, and agencies and schools to allow effective resourcing of supports for foster children.

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[30] The comprehensive audit undertaken by the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection Dr. Geoffrey Shannon. considered 591 cases in 2014 where the Gardaí exercised emergency powers under section 12 of the Child Care Act 1991, to remove a child to a place of safety. 91 examples of children for whom this power was exercised are described. It also included an audit of the emergency child protection powers in 2015.
[31] More information here athttps://www.ispcc.ie/campaigns-lobbying/publications/section-12-audit-briefing-ispcc-/16004

Recommendation 10. Tackle information silos.

Investigate the ways in which information silos are agency specific or school specific, to be integrated to allow an improved service to optimize educational opportunities for foster children.

This research has considered the development phase of children and the consequences of neglect which has been exaggerated by the prolonged process that child services need to enact before children at risk are protected in care. The timeframe of supports need to match the timeframe of children, not the judiciary or administrative procedures in care service provision.

Recommendation 11. Focus supports according to timeline of Child in care.

Focus supports for children at risk according to their timeframe and recognize that the timeframe of the judiciary and resource restraints of *Tusl*a have led to increased stress for foster children in their cognitive development.

5.6 Significant Contribution to knowledge

This study added to the corpus of literature on optimizing the education of foster children by the under researched area of the perspectives of teachers and social workers at the sharp end of educational responsibility. It was unique in that it offer a perspective of School Principals, teachers and social workers with the aim to investigate stress points in managing multiple stakeholdership in the education of foster children. To that end it was successful by adding another perspective to the debate, through the lens of those teachers and educational stakeholders and the lateral connections that need to be developed to optimize the educational opportunities for foster children.

It adds another perspective to the corpus of research on the education of foster children. It has contributed by affirming the previous literature in a number of areas, while also forging new ground in the areas of collaboration and managing the relative power relationships between the stakeholders. There is a number of recommendations outlined

above which are a result of this research. They have been developed by an acute focus on the teachers and social workers enable more efficient processes to manage the boundaries, reduce information silos, and relieve the frustration that all parties feel, in a time of resource restraints.

Educational attainment is the key to escaping the consequences of neglect for foster children to allow them to make better informed choices, so they may escape the path followed by so many children in care before them.

This research adds to the corpus but also it is timely in that it reflects the urge to do better, and be more accountable, to each other and to the children in care.

It was framed with Bronfenbrenner's socio ecological approach which was an apt framework to express the multitude of ecologies that have to be accommodated when dealing with the complexities of children in care due to the numerous participants tasked with their educational responsibility. The framework facilitated a deep exploration of the lateral connections required in the meso system, which need to be efficiently managed to optimize the direct relationships with the foster child and enable positive development in the foster child's personal traits of resilience and self-esteem which will enable them to traverse their educational journey to more successful outcomes.

It triangulated the previous research by providing the perspective of teachers and social workers to give weight to previous research. Where it did not depart from previous literature, it reinforced the validity of previous finding, however it also was topical in that it highlighted and gave new findings in the Irish context framed by the recommendations.

Throughout this research, they have all been motivated by the same vocation, that of supporting the foster child. To that end , it appears disingenuous to criticize without first identifying the stress points in a robust fashion and teasing out the complex issues that occur when institutions are placed together to work in concert without the signposts needed. This research provides those signposts. this research undertook a very structured approach to teasing out the various strands that affect the educational attainment of foster children through the lens of those stakeholders responsible for their educational remit.

The purpose of research is connected between the need to research and the need to improve

5.7 Recommendations for future research.

All stakeholders in this study have advocated for the inclusion of a full-time psychotherapist across all the differing school structures, private and public. This reflects the changing nature of society with the preponderance of issues among teenagers potentially due to the various platforms that dictate and bombard this vulnerable group with messages of what constitutes value, worth and self-esteem. A longitudinal return on investment (ROI) study could be carried out to assess the inclusion of a full-time educational psychotherapist to combat these increasing social pressures which are real and pervasive.

Teachers seemed to gauge their level of success with a foster child on keeping the child engaged in the educational process. Further research is needed in the area of stakeholder management on how the hierarchy of responsibilities can exist while also empowering and recognizing the input of the various stakeholders(Recommendation 7). It may be worthwhile to investigate the ways in which information silos are agency specific or school specific, to be integrated to allow an improved service to optimize educational opportunities for foster children (Recommendation 10). Consideration should be given to developing a software application that can be shared and ring fenced between the various stakeholders to facilitate updates, and opinions in a timely manner between the stakeholders, based upon the stakeholder's direct interaction with the foster child.(Recommendation 9).

The findings in this study have been discussed in Chapter 5. In drawing conclusions from the research I am cognisant of the limitations of the study. Firstly the sample size was small and different types of school and different regions are not represented proportionately. Secondly the study was confined to a 'situated perspective' (Ribbins and Marland, 1994, p.6); therefore information was gleaned from the self reporting of 11 stakeholders and was not accompanied by observation of the stakeholders in action or by a framework that set out their accounts against the views of others. While there is no attempt to generalise the outcomes to the whole population of teachers, school principals,

and social workers nevertheless the themes that emerged resonate with themes in the literature optimizing the educational outcomes for children in care. I contend that a deeper investigation of these themes with a wider group of stakeholders would elicit further valuable information on the challenges that teachers face in the education of foster children

5.8 Limitations of the Research.

The undertaking of this thesis has been a rewarding yet challenging experience and I believe the findings and data collected during this study provide an important insight into the experience of the varied educational stakeholders who are tasked with engaging a foster child in their education. However, on reflection, there have undoubtedly been challenges and acknowledged limitations.

The limitations of this report are the same reasons that it has been of value, it's scope. This research deliberately did not look at all the various applications of Brofenbrenner's socio ecological model in particular the macro system. However, there is merit to combine this perspectives and entwine between the other systems. Also, this research was exploratory, and the next phase would be directed at action research is the area to validate and operationalize mechanisms to increase collaboration between stakeholders. This research excluded foster children themselves and birth parents and relative are since they were peripheral to the core research . However, there is value in is continuing a 2nd phase to develop the perspective of foster children and their perspective on the above recommendations or a longitudinal study with action research to evaluate the benefits of the recommendations

5.9 Concluding Remarks.

This research attempted to bridge the gap between two distinct motivations; a desire to know (basic research) and a motivation to improve (applied research).

Whereas there has been a lot of recent research on the catering to the challenges of disadvantaged in our society the policy makers have concentrated on linear problems and instilling linear solutions, without taking stock of the weakness in the various ecologies

that they , the child service providers (*Tusla*), and other stakeholders inhabit. The solutions are not linear, rather they are complex and require reflection and research from many perspectives, those in the provision of childcare, the educationalists and sociologists. At the end of this research, this novice researcher is even more certain that only a collaboration of perspectives will engineer valuable insights into alleviating the consequences of neglect through education. This research adds to the corpus illuminating through the lens of those directly tasked with the educational remit of foster children in Ireland.

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APPENDIX A

Plain Language Statement.

Appendix A- Research Ethical Forms

Plain Language Statement All Participants

Dear Principal/ Teacher /Social Worker

 Introduction to the Research Study

This research study is entitled: '*Identifying challenges facing the management of foster children in post primary schools. The case of Ireland'.*
The study is part of the requirement for the completion of the Professional Doctorate Programme in Dublin City University.

The research will be conducted by myself, Daniel O'Sullivan, (daniel.osulllivan2@mail.dcu.ie) under the supervision of Dr. Martin Brown, School of Education Studies, Dublin City University, Dublin 9.

What is it about ?

The aim of this study is to gain an understanding of the challenges and issues in fulfilling the educational remit of students in foster care in the post-primary setting. Upon completion, this research hopes to bring significant improvements to the process of aligning multiple stakeholders in working in tandem to the benefit of the foster child.

I wish to maximise the effectiveness of the teaching staff in catering for the needs of the foster child and to benefit the foster child to gain the best opportunity to exploit their educational journey to the fullest extent, academically, socially and from a community perspective

Why have you been chosen and how I obtained your details.

You have been selected as informed stakeholders who contribute to the educational remit of foster children and/or have an understanding of what qualifies as success in an

educational journey. I have obtained contact details from published statutory sources in the case of Principals, and through referrals from Principals and informed permission to contact individual teacher interview subjects. In the case of Social workers I have received permission to contact you from Line Managers in TUSLA on foot of written submissions by this researcher for engagement.

What will happen if you decide to participate. Benefits. Risks

Participation in this study will involve being interviewed by me, for approximately 45 minutes; the interview will focus on your experiences with foster children from an educational perspective and considerations on what you perceive as success in an educational setting.

With your permission, I will audio-tape the interview. The tape-recording will be transcribed for analysis by me, following the interview.

All interviews shall take place at the convenience of the interviewee. No direct benefit, in the form of inducement or otherwise, is attached to participation in this study. However, on completion, your contribution shall both aid significant improvements to the process of aligning multiple stakeholders in working in tandem to the benefit of the foster child and allow you the opportunity to influence policy in this area of Irish foster education.

There are no obvious risks in participation apart from the disclosure that any illicit evidence uncovered during my investigations shall be reported to the relevant authorities.

Legal Limitations and Privacy Issues.

All the information that is gathered as part of this study will be treated as highly confidential, and no names will be used in any form in the published research. In the final report, you will be referred to by a pseudonym. Any references to personal information that might allow someone to guess your identity will be removed, however, due to the small sample of participants, it is possible that someone may still be able to identify you.

The audio material shall not ever be played in any public forum. All the research data gathered will be locked securely in an office at all times and only the researcher will have access to this information. Data and information gathered will be treated as confidential and will be stored securely during the lifetime of this study. There will be no public access to the audio-tapes of the interviews.

Confidentiality of information, while promised, is subject to legal limitations and, in the event of a subpoena or a Freedom of Information claim, protection cannot be guaranteed.

Audio-tapes and transcripts of the interviews will be stored securely by me for the duration of this research study; they will be destroyed on completion of the final research project.

Subsequent Withdrawal. Change of Mind.

Please be advised that participation in the research study is completely voluntary, and any participant may withdraw from the study at any point without facing any penalties or negative effects in taking further courses with Dublin City University.

If the participant at any choose to withdraw their data will be removed from the study and destroyed forthwith and that the data will be protected according to the Data Protection Directive.

Further Information or Concerns etc.

The sample size for this project is relatively small; every effort will be taken to ensure the privacy and anonymity to which you are entitled. Interviewees will not be named or identified: those being interviewed will be referred to as Interviewee 1, 2 and 3 etc.

If you have any further questions regarding the research, feel free to contact me at any time on (087)6565061 or daniel.osulllivan2@mail.dcu.ie

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o

Office of the Vice President for Research, Dublin City University, Dublin9.Tel:01-7008000.

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

Teacher/Social Worker Informed Consent Form

Research Study Title :

Identifying challenges facing the management of foster children in schools. The case of Ireland

Purpose of Research :

The purpose of the study is to explore and better understand the world of the foster child and the overarching research question is a case study approach to identify and examine the challenges facing the management of foster children in schools through the lens of the various stakeholders (principals, teachers, foster parents, social workers, etc.) that have a vested interest in the care and management of foster children.

Dear

You are being invited to take part in this research study as you have had experience in the educational development of a foster child. This research study aims to gain an understanding of the challenges and issues that affect the educational journey of a foster child.

This research is being carried out by Mr. Daniel O'Sullivan as part of a Doctorate in Education in the School of Education at Dublin City University. The study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Martin Brown (School of Education Dublin City University).

Please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)

Have you read or had read to you the Plain Language Statement Yes/No?

Do you understand the information provided? Yes/No

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? Yes/No

Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? Yes/No

Are you aware that if selected your follow-up interview will be audiotaped? Yes/No

Please note that participation in the research study is completely voluntary and that you may withdraw from the study at any point without facing any penalties with DCU. All research materials shall be kept in a secure locked facility at the School of Education at Dublin City University with the data collected being destroyed five years after the research publication date.

All information that is gathered as part of this study will be treated as highly confidential, and no names will be used in any form of the published research. Interview data shall only be used for the purpose of this research and will be used for transcription purposes only. The audio recordings will be destroyed after the research is complete. All analysed data and audio recordings will be stored in a secure location by the researcher.

If you agree to take part in the research, please complete the below:

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.

Participant's signature: _____

Participant's name in block capitals: _____

Date: _____

Type of participant:

APPENDIX C

Interview Schedule.

Interview Schedule. February 2018.

Interviewer :Daniel O'Sullivan Doctorate in Education candidate DCU.

Please note that the purpose of this interview is to explore avenues of investigation and hopefully inform a survey questionnaire exploring challenges, attitudes and perceptions of success in relation to the education of foster children

Please note that all ethical principles apply see adjoining DCU ethics approval.

Stakeholdership

- In your view what stakeholder (s) has the largest influence on the educational development of the foster child, parent, foster parent, teacher, social worker, foster child, Guardians ad lietem, other peripheral stakeholders?

- Can you identify the stress points if any in your relationship with the various stakeholders

- As the primary body with overall responsibility for the foster child including their educational remit, what are your experiences in dealing with other stakeholders in the development and education of foster children?

TUSLA and Educational remit

- Do you believe that TUSLA have the necessary skills or support that enables you to fulfil your remit in the educational development of the foster child?

- Are there any obstacles or trends that challenge this educational remit?

- Do you believe in your experience that a foster child is adequately resourced to develop their potential educationally? If not why?

- On a higher policy perspective do you believe that the policy is adequate in respect of the educational remit for foster children If not,how can it be improved?

- Do you believe that foster children have an equal opportunity to succeed to the best of their potential academically and educationally given their personal circumstances or are there particular barriers that you can see either from a policy standpoint or a functional weakness in managing the foster child?

Perception of Foster child in education

- Do you have an opinion on whether there are unique challenges that face foster children in an educational setting If so what are they? If not then why?

- How do you define success in the educational development of the foster child?

- How much responsibility should be placed upon the foster child to manage their own educational journey. Is self-empowerment a policy directive for this cohort?

Expanding horizons

- What other issues do you deem important? Is there anything else that needs to be addressed to ensure a level playing pitch for children with multiple stakeholders?

- Finally, if resources were no barrier what services should be provided to fully facilitate the engagement of foster children in their educational journey. Are they critical, desirable or wishful thinking?

Thank you for your insights .

_____.
Daniel O'Sullivan MSc. M.B.A.

APPENDIX D

DCU Ethics Proposal

Mr Daniel O'Sullivan
School of Policy and Practice
DCU Institute of Education

10 March 2017

REC Reference:	**DCUREC/2017/004**
Proposal Title:	**Identifying challenges facing the management of foster children in post primary schools. The case of Ireland**
Applicant(s):	**Mr Daniel O'Sullivan, Dr Martin Brown**

Dear Daniel,

Further to expedited review, the DCU Research Ethics Committee approves this research proposal.

Materials used to recruit participants should note that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee.

Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further amendment submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Dónal O'Gorman
Chairperson
DCU Research Ethics Committee

APPENDIX E

Interview Transcript

Interview transcript with   dated 20th April 2018 (46 mins long 1430 -1516)

Department of Children and Youth Affairs

Mespil Road

Dublin 4

Daniel: As the primary body with overall responsibility for the foster child, including their educational remit, what are your experiences in dealing with other stakeholders in the development, and education, of foster children?

First and foremost, it is important to say the Department remit is policy legislation funding, an oversight in how that is spent, standards and the like - we don't directly deliver a service, so therefore looking to see how services are delivered. So, it is kind of a push-pull factor between setting the legislation, standards, and policy, corporate plan, business plan, and all the kind of ways you framework, how delivery will happen, and you are checking to see what actually happened, and you do that through our own performance indicators, reports, HIQA, you know, whatever way we need to get the information, that's the kind of framework. So, from a policy point of view, I see education as being extremely important for children in care, as you say...if I can put it in two ways, many, many children in care have had trauma, attachment difficulties, and multiple placements in some small cases, and education can act as a normative place, where every child goes and they can be just themselves, and also it can offer them opportunities to place themselves in the adult world that is different from where they come from ...but the other thing that I am very keen on, and I don't think we hear very much about, is ambition for children in foster care. We have children placed from a very young age so there may have been challenges antenatally, but their placement may be very steady and really, foster care should not become the defining characteristic. It should not define them. They should define themselves. It's interesting you ask that question. We don't have the data that we would like to have, and we have just set up a subgroup in the department just to find out what data we actually have, and what are the possibilities of accessing data at a national level.

Daniel: There is no national database?

No. Obviously social workers individually have data...I'm thinking of the Drumcondras, like every parent is interested to know where their child is on the Drumcondras, and it is

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very interesting because all young policy makers and young social workers, who have not gone through National Schools don't know what you are talking about, unless if they are so young they went through it themselves...like very normative things, like where they are placed, but also maybe using PPS numbers, like can we engage the Department of Education to see how children in care have performed in Junior Cert. and Leaving Cert? If we give them the numbers, and measure against the non-foster cohort? (now, we are only exploring this…the Data Commissioner may have reservations). We are working towards highlighting education as a core component of foster care.

When I came into this job a number of years ago, I put into the system performance indicators to be reported annually and we get stats on that, and I know some say 'oh hold on a second, you don't know, they could be registered in a school, and they could be getting eight hours', but given we have 6% of children in residential care, and the rest in foster care, and best of my knowledge there are very few children in foster care on an eight hour education programme unless they have a particular learning need...But as far as I am aware the majority of children in fostercare attend at school emm... I don't think foster carers would put up with it if they were at home all day

Daniel: Yes, there is that boundary.

Yes, so if that's the case we are hitting a very high level of attendance. You have those figures, don't you?

Daniel: Yes.

It's between 1 and 2 percent which, internationally, is a 'Wow'. We know they are going, we don't know how they are getting on. I must say, I know there was a report done a number of years ago - it was Trinity and ESRI - they did on children in care on education. Are you familiar with it?

Daniel: Yes, I am.

There is a very good lit. review on education, and all the right things were said. I was very disappointed 'cause they interviewed 15 children and adults as 5 were in aftercare.

Daniel: Darmody Gilligan (Education of Children in Care in Ireland:An Exploratory Study 2013)

Yes, I know as I just looked recently because of this thing. My concern was, 7 of the 15 had been in residential care and it might be expected they had a more troubled and fractured path with education, and they had with almost everything, and I just felt as 92% of children in fostercare, and given we know very little about experiences, the cohort was a misrepresentation of what I think is the norm now.... it's very hard to prove that - not to

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be all on the defensive - but there is a great desire to focus on negativity and deficits, and it really disturbs me, and not on the broader picture, and it really disturbs me. How do I know this? I wonder if children who leave care and do well don't want to be associated with that label, and don't associate with aftercare, or NGO, and they don't want to talk with Minister etc. because they are getting on with their lives.

Daniel: They don't want a label, they don't wish to go back to that place...

They think of their foster families as their peers, and going on with their education, I think we have to be very careful re. this negative focus...

Daniel: That's very interesting Michelle, as there is a lot of changes, and a lot not being explored. For example I was in a DEIS in Dublin Inner City. There, I was talking to the principal and they have a fantastic trajectory towards third level, and they were saying everyone has a story. Just because they are foster children is only one story. They could also be a latch-key child, suffering physical and mental abuse etc…

Yes, they could have a much more stable life in foster care than other kids...

Daniel: Does this link into theories around attachment theory? And does that theory drive the legislation to date on foster children?

I think that's interesting, as there is a review of the CCA91 going on. I was around for that. It was planned in the 1980s and it was a terrific improvement of what was there before, as that was 1908! mmm ...so we are looking at it now, and one of the things we are looking at is foster care, and it is extremely flat, one-dimensional ...we have 3 or 4 different types of foster care, and children in need of foster care, and a lot of infants come into care who are going to stay, and it's quasi-adoption, and in that instance what can we do if the child is not going for adoption?, that the foster carers get, a lot more ownership? which is the wrong word, control?... mmm agency? that foster carers get a lot more agency in respect to themselves and foster care child, so they apply without too much oversight and controls but, so they can just get on with it.

Daniel: Is this the area about relative care, where a third is with relatives, and it is evident that they tend not, they don't engage with the process, maybe they don't have to? ...maybe they don't need that length of assessment, that oversight?

I think, well… and from speaking with people, the children who are in kindred care, no-one really wanted them in care, but the family that have them need financial support, and it's impossible to get financial help any other way. Well, that's also what we are looking at as well ...how do we support families who want to care for children? We are getting

there. If I could go back to the educational piece that social workers are at fault for not being focused on education, and I say 'at fault' in the broader sense, because social workers are focussed on the placement, trauma, the abuse… It's about connecting with relatives. It's about going to court. It's finding a place, life story books and file and HIQA, and all those things.... and one of the things on a long check list is get the child into school. Once the child is there is 'aaaaahhh' ...but I think the education piece should be much more there, if there is an on-going care plan. I think things like, I know this might sound daft, but if you are in transition year and you need to access work placements, what are we doing for the kids in care to make sure that they are getting really good placements, and I know the bad thing about transition is that parents get to replicate themselves as they get placements that they can get and have influence, but why not do it in favour? So, if Tulsa can't get placements, can't get through their lawyers, solicitors etc. hospitals,,, there should be no problem.

I have said I want to see a lead in education in every region for children in care as I would like to see for health. So, someone there who is chasing social workers - have they got the HPP vaccine? Have they got their injections? Medical records?,,,all of that.

Daniel: Which is on going, especially if they move school. We have the educational passport if they move school, but this is only one thing. But when they leave school, and another thing from the coalface of my research really, like, how they find out is through their peer network, so that type of mentorship is essential.

In saying all this I am now looking at this myself this year because I now have 4 Aps, which is brilliant, as I used to have one. One is a principal social worker, who came to work with me, another is A research data person, the other two are excellent generalists. So, I have suddenly got a little space to do a little thinking.

Daniel: And you can see that with the policy, and the joint committee with foster carers, and the relationship seems good, do you see, are there any tendency of self-protectionism, as with any organisation there may be a self-protection mechanisms... they sort of circle the wagons when there are troubles

Do you mean Tulsa or foster carers?

Daniel: Tusla. Is that a cultural barrier? …this self-protectionist ideology that all institutions have ...to communate and dialog with other institutions…

I think Tulsa and Irish Foster Carers Association would have their differences, but would work very close together. Different functions, but working very co-operatively, I think. Maybe it is a little defensive at times, but they may be less if some of the positives were

acknowledged, instead of it always being a problem. There is a huge problem in Tulsa at the moment about recruitment of social workers, and they are not shouting loudly enough ...Tulsa managed to recruit 8 net social workers last year and there is lots of money.

Daniel: Money not the issue?

They got an extra 40mill this year, 30mill last. They get 3 quarters of a billion. Money is not an issue. It gets spent on agency. We don't have enough social workers coming on board for the demand there is... areas that had been closed down during recession for disability, mental health primary care, they are now hiring again and they look for grads with some experience they are not high-risk jobs in the sense that failure to do something would not, in most cases, lead to a poor outcome, or indeed you are not scrutinised to the same extent, you have more professional autonomy. The amount of rigour and style of regulation, I believe, is driving people out of foster care and child protection work, I think the other thing that happens, and I can see why this happens, if I was a principal socialworker, I have vacancies, and I have a big waiting list of children ...and we know enough to see that someone needs to look deeper here ...so, they have had their preliminary screening, waiting initial assessment, we have nearly 5,000 in that category in the country, and I had two social workers going into a family - one a social worker, and one a link worker on a stable placement,

Daniel: That does not make sense…

But what can happen is that foster carers can feel that they are left to their own devices. But foster carers, if it was a secure placement, then they could have more agency to chase up doctors appointmnet, instead of needing to go through the social worker...

Daniel: So, a lack of empowerment around agencies

So, with the turnover, if you are an experienced foster carer, you would have to be very mature and kind person when you meet that social worker for the first visit to a foster family ever, because that new social worker, as you are training her in, and I remember being that person…

Daniel: We have had that ourselves, kids straight out of college…

They do have a role, a very challenging relationship

Daniel: I'm cutting through this as there is a lot in direct provision centres, like whose remit is it under? who is responsible to deal with potential child welfare there, with the cultural barriers etc.

What remit ?

Daniel: Tusla?

No, oh no. People in direct supervision, the problem is that they are there too long. I know about this as I was on a working group. People can come and claim refugee in this country, and if you have funds you don't have to go there...you are not sent there. If you arrive and have no funds, and can't claim, obviously, then you go into direct provision. Now, the legislation was changed and they have not got enough people… You applied for asylum, and if that did not work, then there was a judicial review, and if you did not get that...three years later you exhausted refusals, and you went to the next level...anyone that is in direct provision there for more than three years are there because they are appealing...and the barriers have come right down, so if they want to get out then they can, but the difficulty is the housing...I read recently a number of people coming in are economic migrants, and so be it...go for it...but we have to understand the difference. So, direct provision is under the Department of Justice - it is for refugees. Chidren are in the care of their families, there is a specialist seconded from Tusla full-time, and works into all the different direct provision centres in relation to child protection, and links into the community. There are standards in direct provision that are being developed currently, and we are on those, and it is very much about the manager. When I visited them the set up might not have been great, but they were happy, since they were treated with kindness.

Daniel: It's compassion, give respect, the other issue is nearly 4,000 children homeless…will this be another issue that will lead to more children in foster care? Or is that too big a leap? Too blunt?

I think it is too blunt. It may lead to a small increase. I know children in care are going down. I don't know the age breakdown. I hope it is in relation to 16-17 yr olds. It could be that the thresholds are increasing, or preventions are better - who is to know? - there is a very serious issue in relation to children's stability in homelessness. There was mention that the chair of the homeless authority, who is retiring, said that the criteria to go on an emergency housing list was encouraging it...people that lived in over-crowding conditions in family homes who were on a housing list got frightened when it was deemed when if you see that if you make yourself homeless you top the list, once you see people skipping the queue it's hard.

Daniel: There does not seem to be any intelligent debate, where the screaming headline is more important...

I think they should be able to say you are homeless and stay in your mother's back bedroom - they can do this in England. So, dont leave...you can still declare yourself

homeless...the bedroom, it's better to be there. Not ideal, but kids in schools, more stable and with grandparents…

I think things that may affect foster kids are we are looking for clearer decision-making, a clearer level of proof that natural parents can rehabilitate, and children can go back, and if that is not happening then making longer-term decisions for children.

Daniel: Is that still the core ethos, to make it that children go back to parents in all possible ways?

I would not say in all cases, It's moderated, the overall aim is that children should be raised by their families, and parents need support in some cases - some more than others - and if your child needs to come into care, either voluntary, or by the courts, the courts, in the first instance, decide. Can the family be supported? Can the child go back? Sometimes, in rare instances, on day one it is decided that the child cannot go back, if there is negative history. So, courts look to see if additional counselling has been sought, stuff like this...Prior to this, the constitution did swing in the favour of the parents, and the the amendment of the childcare constitution has, and should balance this, but will only become real when it is tested out through cases, and there has been very little testing, little evidence...but it will be based upon practice decisions, it's about attachment. Attachment is important but a lot of children coming into care don't have attachment...you cannot assume that if you are with a parent who has addiction or mental health issues there may not been a great attachment. There is attachment, then there's children, and temperment and resilience

Daniel: On resilience, how much responsibility do you place on the child in the learning contract? How do you do that?

Yes. With a relationship, take the foster parent and the teacher, you know, your child, you have to make a deal and push the child when you need to, and with others you have to be much more tender...there is no one size fits all.

Daniel: Do you think when supports are there for the child it may hinder the resilience needed, as in, 'well I have supports and hence I need them', so 'it's out of my hands' so its like 'I don't need to step up'

That word 'support'…I don't like it, 'engagement contact'....be better. If I was a social care worker I would say 'you can do stuff', ambition is normal.... if a child comes late, or poor family history…

Daniel: It's going to be much more difficult

That's why I say there are different types of foster care and needs...but I do think from Tulsa, care planning services has been lacking. Yes, they must go to school, but focus and attention has been lacking. For instance, getting learning histories, linking all this together if a kid arrives into a school and no space...can you pull rank and get that child in?

Daniel: The timings of changes in a foster child status, usually when they are in a Leaving Cert. year, and all the pressures therein, like a change in status...a different social worker is allocated when they become 18...they may exit the process ...does that need to be looked at?

Yes, it is through aftercare. For starters, most kids do their Leaving after they are 18, so that has changed things. Secondly, about 45% stay on in the placement, or use if they go away to college, so the foster care remains their key...we have a stat that says the 54% figure for over 18 year olds in third level training or school go on to third level or further training. I'm not sure how good that stat is... I would want to look at it later to see valid retention.... there is a 300 allowance for young adults available when they are in education or training, as well as a double SUSI grant...you also get double the SUSI grant...I think it may be too much, what are they going to do with it all. I think we have 400 or 500 kids leave care each year.

Daniel: Is this what you said earlier, that they don't want to be associated with this former part of their lives?

Some might not.

Daniel: Another thing, there is no legislation that dictates that you need to support after Leaving Cert., unlike England where they have to...here it is at the local discretion of the relative councils who distribute the grants.

Our Aftercare legislation says there must be an aftercare plan for eligible young people leaving care, and they can return to Tusla, up to the age of 21, to have the plan revised (where there are life changes) or to ask for a plan if they did not want one on leaving care. Tusla policy provides for all aspects that Tusla has authority - financial aid, and aftercare worker to help negotiate state services such as education / housing etc. Many 18 year olds remain in foster care. Young adults remain in residential care until they have completed their 2nd level education.

Daniel: The last thing I was going to ask you…how do you define the sucess of foster children in their educational trajectory?

That child, and their potential, they done as well as they can do. And the other thing we have to think of, and it's for lots of different kids, is, and much more in the care situation,

and I said this to Tulsa, but they have not bought into it yet - they may go back to it - life long learning. We have an idea that learning is very linear, you do this, then that etc. Parents are terrified that their kids may take a year out and not ...carry on ...and sometimes they need that time just to work through some stuff and we have 'you can come back up to 21'. I want a plan and if you get a plan resources will come with it ....

Daniel: It's a net.

It's a bit of a net. You need aftercare workers to be actively chasing these kids, so if you are told to go away, just come back...I would see it even if a kid does not get the points, you will at a future date.

Daniel: The problem with league tables, they are measuring the easy stuff not the messy stuff.

I would not expect - hang on what am I saying - I *would* expect kids in care to do overall better than some of the other kids in area they have come from in many ways, but maybe not as well as others. If a kid is in long-term foster care I'd expect them to do pretty well, but if their journey is much more broken they are not going to do so well.

Daniel: In our experience, we have seen the youngst one when she came had awful Drumcondra scores. You could see the demands on all so she was going to be held back. Social workers are blamed for everything.

Social workers don't know how children learn…teachers know. They are the professionals. We don't have a teacher employed in all of Tulsa...some can't learn everything, it's all about being referring to therapy or counselling, and that can do good work...sometimes, just let me be happy normal achieving, and this can be healing in itself, just to get on instead of 'oh I did not get the counselling', as if that fixes all.

I was in Mayo a few years ago - a foster carer's talk - and it was County jersey stuff…the guy stood up and said let me tell you, I checked before I came in here this evening…every child in foster care in Mayo was in education or training. Now, there was not that many, but still. And we were over in England recently on a different matter…I mentioned to the Chief Superintendent of the Police there, and we were talking about child exploitation and there was a lot going on. We don't seem to have that much. Now, I'm not saying we don't, but does not seem to be, and then I say we only have 6% of care kids are in residential care…What? How do you do that? Well, we support our foster carers ...by that I mean financially, very well financially…allows one parent not to work full-time, or at all, and we have a tradition of it, but we can't assume this will carry on so it has to be managed. As a result, we are less likely to have kids run away or leave school, and less

likely to have child exploitation, even not so much residential care as numbers have got so small, and some have had troubles. Bt about ten years ago, or 15 years, I did a study of the Mercy child care homes and at the time there was a big attendancy at school - three bungalows on a site - even if nuns were not there - in fact there was only one nun - but the ethos of education was there. This is what we do, and the last thing I wanted to say on residential care…unlike England, our residential care workers have diplomas and degrees, whereas in England, a lot of care workers went into it as they are anti-authority, they did sociology and have a bit of an ideal view of the world, whereas our social workers would say, of course, you go to school

Daniel: Can I ask you this: As I still see it, I see it in the education system, that the teacher becomes more like a counsellor and advocate, where I don't see this in research. I have seen elsewhere, so would you feel it's because of our religious vocation towards education?

I dont know. I was focussed on the residential. I think we place a very high value on education in this country by parents, and teachers zone in on this. I know from a social worker, you may be dealing with 15/20 kids in care when, in fact, that teacher may only ever have one. It's unusual enough so they would have interest. Can I ask you, are all our schools made aware about kids in care?

Daniel: No unless there is a problem. In general no. In good schools they have a mentoring system for kids so that mentor can inform teachers, linear dialogue.

Here's my concern…I think there should be a teacher lead alongside social workers so this I feel would work better, would that be senior or secondary school are you getting to meet?

Daniel: I am talking to teachers and home school officers, social workers, guardians as litem,

Could I ask if you are meeting teachers in school? And if you are saying teachers are only made aware where there is a problem? Do you mean are you only going to hear of teachers who have problems, as opposed to teachers who are fine?

Daniel: This is it. And when you talk to teachers, of course there is a bias there…they have to opt in

Can you through fostercarers, who have no problems, ask why there are no problems, as people work actively to make sure there are problems, it has not just happened

Daniel: This is the problem with the academic outlier if you go for people of bias, people who jump up and down. So, if I talk to fosterparents who have not had a problem, it would be more biased.

That, in some way, is more important than this. Of course, continuity is very important

Daniel: and resilience, socialisation…

Daniel: Lastly, stress points in an ideal world…If you had all the funds and carers available what would you do differently? Would you bring in psychotherapy? This is for teachers and not just foster children. This is for all children, because of the world we live, we need them.

I was a qualified psychotherapist, that was what I did a lot of before. I don't know I would skill foster carers more as the primary carers. Now, not saying as adolesents they may like somewhere private to talk, but sometimes people latch on, and it's not helpful. If kids are stressed or isolated, by and large, I would skill up foster carers

Daniel: As they are the primary carer…

Even I remember when I worked in CAMHS, and I did see kids on their own, but I used often ask to see the foster Mum on her own, and talk through the experience, that if a kid has those issues talk through them and see how she can understand, and give confidence, for a kid to feel they are cared for by a confident person, instead of trotting to see 'that nice lady' once a week. I'm not saying there is not a place for it, but if a child is seeing it in a residential unit…One thing I used to do - I remember Sean McDermott street residential care, which was really like a hostel where kids were very vulnerable - I would go and use a therapeutic hour to do, maybe the family tree, such things like baby food, and hot water bottles, even a staff member reading a story - actually recreation - to allow them to come back to a place of trust. So, basic needs were being cared for - it seems very simple but in doing work like that could be far more rewarding than psychotherapy as, yes, in a year you may get results, but not now. That is far more immediate, as I don't like this thing of push to the expert, push it back, push it back, but people need support when they're looking for counselling for child - they probably need support for themselves.

Daniel: We did. We had an issue. We went to one session, maybe it's Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown as we had 5 workers around us

It's messy.... you can't legislate for that...and then the different ways to do it, as some kids don't want schools to know. So that is a difficulty. Now, I know one girl, now woman in her early 40s, who is in Australia and CEO of a big IT company, and I met her in a homeless shelter, and she had run away for a very good reason, and her school (an inner-

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city all-Catholic school) was great, and even if she went away from the hostel, she always went to school, and it was a teacher who always had clean shirts

Daniel: You are still in touch?

Yes. I am in her list. She comes back every three years, and it's great.

Daniel: I thank you for a very candid interview. I think I have taken too much of your time, but I could go on, but I know that it's thank you

Well you are welcome. Good luck with it

(Interview ends Machine switched off 15.16 (46 min in)

APPENDIX F

Glossary of Terms

Access: Meetings between a child and members of his or her family, usually parents and siblings, when the child or children is in care. Access may be supervised when contact with the parents is considered to be a risk to the child's welfare

Attachment disorder: This is a disorder arising in children who have had very disrupted care in their infancy, where they have been unable to form a secure attachment to a parent figures, affecting their emotional development and ability to form relationships.

Care Order: An order, either interim or long-term, made by the courts permitting the State to take a child into care where the court decides the child is in need of care and protection.

Case conference: Conferences concerning children and families considered at risk where the various professionals can co-ordinate their approach and make recommendations. Parents are not entitled to attend, but may be invited to.

Children First guidelines: Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children outlines how child protection should be at the centre of all organisations working with children, including educational and recreational organisations.

Emergency Care Order: This is an order made taking a child into care where he/ she is considered to be at immediate and serious risk. Tthe application can be made without notifying the parents if the safety of the child requires it.

Foster care: The great majority of children in State care are in family homes in the care of foster parents, either contracted directly by Tusla or working for private organisations.

Guardian ad litem: Section 26 of the 1991 Child Care Act allows the court to appoint a guardian ad litem for a child in child care proceedings where it is necessary in the interests of the child and in the interests of justice. No criteria are laid down for who can act as a guardian ad litem, though in practice they are usually qualified social workers.

High support units: Residential units for children in need of special care and protection who are unlikely to receive it in a foster care placement or ordinary residential unit. The child is not detained there, however, and can leave, unlike when he or she is detained by order of the High Court in a Special Care Unit.

Non-accidental injury: This is the term used to describe injuries sustained by a child while in the care of his or her parents, and which cannot be explained by an accident. They are usually inflicted deliberately or through negligence concerning the danger posed by actions of the parent towards the child.

Placement (of child): This refers to the placement of a child in foster care or residential institution.

Risk assessment: Risk assessment involves assessing the probability of a particular adverse event happening to a child within a specific period or in specific circumstances, and requires evaluating the circumstances known to create such a risk.

Section 47 application: This section of the Child Care Act enables the District Court, on its own motion (own initiative) or on the application of any person, to give directions or make orders affecting the welfare of the child. It is often used by guardians ad litem or parents to obtain specific services for a child or change aspects of the child's care.

Special care units: These are units where children with severe emotional and behavioural problems may be detained for therapeutic purposes. Children can only be detained in them by order of the High Court.

Supervision Order: This is an order made by the District Court under Section 19 of the Child Care Act where the court has reason to believe that a child's health, development or welfare are at risk, and authorises the Child and Family Agency to visit the child in his or her home to ensure the child's welfare is being promoted.

Unaccompanied minor: These are children under the age of 18 who are found entering Ireland or in Ireland without a responsible adult.

Welfare of the child: This is not defined in the 1991 Act, though the courts have defined it to include health and well-being, physical and emotional welfare and moral and religious welfare, as well as being materially provided for. The "best interests of the child" is often used in the same context.

APPENDIX G

History of Fostering in Ireland.

Fostering has a long tradition in Ireland. The concept of fostering by the State can trace its origin back to the early 1700s when George I ordered parishes to arrange for homeless children or those who were deemed to be in poverty, to be raised within Protestant families. The motives behind this were political, as the Protestant carers were found to be 'politically reliable and thus could be safely expected to socialise poor (Catholic) youngsters in loyal citizenship' (Gilligan 1991, p.187).

According to Gilligan, the creation of the Poor Law Amendment Act in 1862 could be viewed as laying the 'foundations of what is now the modern system of fostering in Ireland' (p.187). This law put into place procedures whereby children could be 'boarded out' and was viewed by many at the time as a more humane response to the social ills of the day and how they impacted on children.

Industrial schools were also established in 1868 for children who were abandoned, deserted or orphaned, and accounted for the largest number of children in care. Ferguson (2007, p.125) explains that 'essentially, reformatory schools catered for known or repeat offenders, while industrial schools were set up to care for what today would be called youth 'at risk' or 'pre-delinquents'. 'The third grouping were those children in so-called orphanages which were mainly fee-paying institutions for the middle classes. Finally, some children were either destitute or born to unmarried mothers' (Raftery and O'Sullivan 1999, p.20).

From the 1850s three female religious orders, the Sisters of Mercy, the Irish Sisters of Charity and the Daughters of Charity were to the forefront of establishing new schools, as an institutional approach was the dominant model employed in the care of vulnerable children. The expansion of the institutional care model impacted upon the foster care system (or 'boarding out' as it was commonly referred to at the time), as industrial schools became the immediate placement for children taken into care (Raftery and O'Sullivan, 1999, p.107).

In the second half of the 19th century, with the workhouses no longer being considered as an appropriate environment for children, various private charities and religious-controlled institutions offered an alternative system of education for Foster Care Children

by setting up the reformatories and industrial schools (Fahy, 1995). The churches role in education cannot be overstated. Since the civil war the Catholic Church provided the resources needed for educational provision. Drudy and Lynch (1993) remarked that the new state had 'neither the political will nor the financial resources to challenge the power of the churches in education' which resulted in the creation of a mutually beneficial relationship between the Churches and the State (p.74). This relationship had a profound and lasting effect on Irish society and in particular the influence on how foster children were managed in Ireland. This process of educating foster care children continued until the 1970s. The influence of the Catholic church may be evaluated in the light of the number of reports and inquiries into the mistreatment of children in care (*Report into Inquiry into the Operation of Madonna House, 1996; Ryan Report 2009; Commission of Investigation, Report into the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin 2009; The Magdalen Commission Report Mr. Justice John Quirke 2013; Mothers and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation 2017.*)

Indeed, it was not until the publishing of the *Kennedy Report* in 1970 that we saw a fundamental shift regarding the provision of care for children who were not living with their birth family. Specifically, since this time, there has been a greater emphasis on the use of foster families as opposed to residential care. Foster Care has become the dominant form of state care for children who cannot live at home over the past decade, so much so, that Kelly and Gilligan (2002, p.9) have referred to foster care as the 'work-horse' of the child welfare system. The issue then becomes whether the adequate focus was given to the supports necessary to accommodate this grouping in mainstream schooling?

The *Kennedy Report* at the time was a watershed moment in the development of child care policy and practice in Ireland. The report was a damning indictment of the industrial school era and led to the closure of large-scale institutions, with a community care approach replacing the ethos of institutionalised care.

Children in the industrial schools were moved to smaller community-based residential homes, and foster care became the preferred option for children in state care. According to Craig *et al.* (1998) this decade saw a move away from the Catholic Church's grip on power, as models of community support replaced the model of institutionalised care.

Two texts which consider the historical development and current provision of child care services in this country are Buckley's *Child Protection and Welfare (2002)* on interventions and innovations in the area of child abuse based on one hundred plus research projects by students in Trinity College Dublin and Gilligan's *Irish Child Care Services (1991)* on the policies and provision of child care in Ireland. A historical perspective is found in such texts as Raftery and O'Sullivan's *Suffer Little Children (2004)* which concentrates on telling the story of young people who have been in state care. Referring to the institutionalised system, Raftery and O'Sullivan (1999, p.57) state that: 'There is no doubt that children in need of care were significantly disadvantaged by this approach. All attempts to provide them with a normal family life effectively ended with the rise of these institutions'.

The Catholic Church had long played a significant role in providing resources to maintain educational provision. It owned a considerable amount of resources in the field of education and the government was reluctant to challenge this dominance for a number of reasons. To begin with, the Church had the support of the vast majority of the people and was a major force in the life of the people, and exerted enormous influence and power. 'By this stage Irish politicians had learned the lesson that the church viewed the control of schooling as its prerogative' (Coolahan 1981, p.73) and that 'even if any of the new leaders had other ideas it was very prudent in the context of an Ireland divided by civil war not to antagonise such a powerful entity as the Catholic Church' (ibid). The new state had 'neither the political will nor the financial resources to challenge the power of the churches in education' which resulted in the creation of a mutually beneficial relationship between the Churches and the State (Drudy and Lynch 1993, p.74). This relationship had a profound and lasting effect on Irish society.