"This is a new start for you". Exploring adopted young people's educational experience and what works well to support their transition to secondary school

Danielle Barry

Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology

School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences

Newcastle University

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Disclaimer

I certify that the work in this thesis is my own and has not been submitted as part of any other work.

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I hope this research may be used to inform service delivery and provide an opportunity for joined up working with teachers and social work colleagues.

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Chapter 1- Systematic Literature Review

*What are the educational experiences of adopted children and young people?
Exploring the views of adopted children, their parents and teachers*

Abstract

Adopted children and young people (CYP) can be considered by schools and external agencies to have found their 'happy ending' (Langton, 2017). Despite this narrative, research has found that 50% of adoptive placements breakdown (SCIE, 2004). In addition, although adopted CYP achieve better educational outcomes when compared to looked after children (LAC); they achieve poorer outcomes when compared to the rest of the population (Brown, Waters, & Shelton, 2017). The first chapter of this thesis uses meta-ethnography to critically review existing qualitative research focusing on the educational experiences of adopted CYP; from the perspective of adopted children, their parents and teachers. Findings emphasise that whilst adopted CYP are of course not a homogenous group, they can experience unique challenges in relation to their schooling. Challenges include whether to share their adoption with peers and a lack of understanding from others regarding the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACE). A key assumption present in many studies was that labels such as attachment disorder and ADHD would lead to appropriate support. However, diagnosis led some adopted CYP to blame themselves for their educational difficulties and promoted a within-child model, rather than looking at ways of adapting the wider school environment. The systematic literature review also identified transition to secondary school as a significant period in adopted CYP's educational careers.

1.0. Introduction

Adoption is defined in government legislation as 'a means of providing a permanent alternative home for some of the children unable to return to their birth parents' (paragraph 1:12 of the White Paper, 2000). Adopted CYP who find a permanent family through adoption or special guardianship can be considered by schools and external agencies to have found their 'happy ending' (Langton, 2017). However, despite adoption being associated with permanence, the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) (2004) found that adoptive placements have a 50% chance of breakdown. Research also shows that adopted CYP commonly experience feelings of ambivalence of being wanted by adoptive parents but also being rejected or given away by their biological parents (Brodzinsky, Singer, & Braff, 1984). Adopted CYP also experience several losses associated with separation from birth parents, siblings and extended family (Smith & Brodzinsky, 2002). Additionally, most children placed for adoption have been in the care system and in 2017 the average age of children at adoption was 3 years and 4 months (Department for Education (DfE), 2017). Thus, adopted CYP may also have to contend with the loss of relationships to foster carers and school peers (Soares, Ralha, Barbosa-Ducharne, & Palacios, 2019).

The reasons why children are adopted have changed vastly over the past 50 years. Today, societal changes and medical advances, reduction in stigma and an improved welfare system have contributed to changes in the reasons why CYP are placed for adoption (Thomas, 2013). However, adopted CYP are not a homogenous group and the reasons for adoption are diverse, such as: the absence of a parent to provide care; acute stress within the family; and disability of the parent (Department for Children, Schools and Families (DfCSF), 2009). Although some adopted CYP will not have experienced adverse childhood experiences (Adoption UK, 2014), research has found that many CYP placed for adoption have experienced early abuse, neglect and trauma (Selwyn, Frazer, & Quinton, 2006).

Moreover, there is an increasing body of research suggesting that the impact of early trauma does not simply go away when a child leaves care and finds permanence (Langton, 2017). The presence of chronic stress can cause CYP to remain in a high state of alertness in case of further trauma (Lansdown, Burnell, & Allen, 2007). Early trauma has also been found to impact on brain development and

cause difficulties with working memory, planning, organising, inhibiting impulsive behaviours and regulating emotions (Bombèr, 2011). These difficulties have a significant impact on children's ability to access learning (Stewart, Orengo-Aguayo, Cohen, Mannarino, & de Arellano, 2017) and ability to maintain interpersonal relationships (Schore, 2001). In the next section, I will go on to explore government legislation in this area and critically discuss what impact this has on the support that adopted CYP receive in school.

1.0.1. Government Legislation and Policy

Government publications in relation to improving outcomes for adopted CYP such as 'Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children' (DfE, 2018), have increased in recent years. Prior to this, government policy such as 'Further action on adoption: finding more loving homes' (DfE, 2013) largely focused on reducing delays and increasing the number of children in local authority care placed for adoption. More recently, reference has been made to improving the capacity of education professionals to meet the needs of adopted CYP. For instance, 'Adoption: A vision for change' tentatively reports the possibility of incorporating the impact of trauma and loss on children's ability to learn into initial teacher training (DfE, 2016).

Despite government initiatives regarding improving outcomes; once CYP are adopted they often become less visible and miss out on the support offered to LAC. For example, they cease to have an allocated social worker or virtual school worker and no longer have LAC reviews or Personal Education Plans to review progress in school. The adoption support fund (DfE, 2015) entitles adoptive parents to request an assessment to see if they are entitled to support. However, if the assessment concludes a family is eligible, this does not always determine access to support, as there are gaps in services both geographically and in capacity (DfE, 2016).

The Children and Social Work Act (2017) states that schools must have a designated member of staff with responsibility for promoting the attainment of previously LAC. However, schools are often not aware of a young person's adoptive status as it is the adoptive parents' choice as to whether this information is shared (King, 2009). Additionally, in common with LAC, adopted CYP often experience a 'double whammy' of simultaneous changes of family and school placement (Syne, Green, & Dyer, 2012). Arguably this lack of support is reflected in attainment

outcomes for adopted CYP. Thus, although research has found that adopted CYP achieve better educational outcomes when compared to LAC; they achieve poorer outcomes when compared to the rest of the population (Brown et al., 2017). The underlying reasons for these poor educational outcomes will be explored in more depth in the next section.

1.0.2. Previous Research

Research exploring the educational experiences and outcomes for adopted CYP is relatively sparse compared to the literature on LAC (Berridge & Saunders, 2009). A lack of research in this area may reflect the commonly held misconceptions referred to earlier: that once CYP are placed for adoption their problems cease to exist (Langton, 2017). Research has compared the educational outcomes of adopted CYP with young people who are fostered or 'disadvantaged' (characterised as such if CYP came from a single-parent and/or low-income family). Wijedasa and Selwyn (2011) found that adopted CYP were more likely to achieve 5 A*- C grades at GCSE compared with the fostered and disadvantaged CYP. Moreover, by age 16-17, the majority of adopted CYP were also in education, training, or employment. These positive outcomes may relate to findings that adopted CYP reported higher aspirations and internal locus of control than fostered or disadvantaged CYP. However, it is important to note that in the Wijedasa and Selwyn (2011) study, adopted CYP experienced more bullying, engaged in more internalising and externalising risky behaviours and experienced more mental health issues. Additionally, meta-analyses have found that adoption may be associated with lower academic attainment, difficulties working independently and keeping on task, increased behavioural problems and difficulty maintaining positive friendships compared with non-adopted comparison groups (Brown et al., 2017; Van Ijzendoorn, Juffer, & Poelhuis, 2005). Adopted parents have also reported that difficulties were exacerbated during adolescence when identity formation and hormonal changes were also prevalent (Adoption UK, 2014).

Van Ijzendoorn et al. (2005) identified early trauma and age at adoption (two years and over) as significant factors associated with poorer educational outcomes. Van Ijzendoorn et al. (2005) hypothesised that the enduring effects of deprivation and abuse may contribute to concentration problems and cognitive delay. However, Van Ijzendoorn et al. (2005) argue that some of the studies included in their meta-

analysis included sparse background information about participants. The impact of early trauma and neglect on later development will be examined in more depth in the next section by providing a critical account of attachment theory.

1.0.3. Attachment Theory and The Impact of Developmental Trauma

Attachment theory is one of many developmental theories for understanding the impact of early social and emotional development and is frequently referred to in the literature about adopted CYP and LAC (Zeanah, 1996). In this section I will critically explore the implications of attachment theory for improving outcomes for adopted CYP. John Bowlby is frequently referred to as the founding father of attachment theory (Holmes & Farnfield, 2014). Bowlby proposed that children have a biological need to seek proximity to caregivers (Slater, 2007). Behaviours such as crying, gurgling and smiling are designed to alert the adult and bring them closer and according to Bowlby have developed from 'primate safety and survival' (Main, Kaplan, Cassidy, Bretherton, & Waters, 1985, p.237). Ainsworth introduced the concept of 'secure base' from which infants can explore their environment (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Ainsworth et al. (1978) also proposed that attachment could be divided into distinct categories: securely attached, anxiously attached avoidant and anxiously attached/ambivalent/resistant. More recently a fourth disorganised-disoriented category has been identified (Main & Solomon, 1990).

Critics of attachment theory have argued that it is reductionist and deterministic (Fonagy, 2018). According to this argument, attachment theory presents a relatively bleak picture, whereby early experiences of abuse and trauma predict poorer life outcomes. Others have argued that terms such as 'reactive attachment disorder' are unhelpful and serve to pathologize children for having a disruptive start to life (Slater, 2007). I would argue that much of the research exploring outcomes for adopted CYP is underlined by two main deterministic assumptions: (1) that once CYP are placed for adoption they have found their 'happy ending' and their troubles cease to exist (Langton, 2017), or (2) that the impact of early trauma and neglect will have a detrimental effect on later life outcomes. However, the experience of being adopted is subjective and idiosyncratic (Neil, 2012). Consequently, the way in which adoptees manage adoption-related losses and gains and overcome adversity is unique.

However, I agree with Slater (2007) who warns against rejecting attachment theory in its entirety and proposes that attachment theory can promote positive change through its recognition of environmental and social factors such as a child's caregiving context. In addition, I believe recent formulations of attachment theory that acknowledge individual and cultural difference, provide a more hopeful lens for viewing children's needs. Crittenden's Dynamic-Maturational Model of Attachment proposes that through adaptation to our ever-changing environment humans develop increasingly complex 'self-protective strategies' as a means of having our needs met (Landa & Duschinsky, 2013). I argue that Crittenden's model moves away from the deterministic conceptualisation of attachment portrayed by Bowlby and Ainsworth, instead presenting a fluid description of attachment that accounts for change and diversity across cultures and lifespan. I believe this model of attachment provides a more optimistic outlook regarding the potential for individuals to find a pathway to safety and comfort (Crittenden & Claussen, 2000).

1.0.4. Relevance to Educational Psychologists

Research exploring the educational experiences of adopted CYP is relevant to the role of the educational psychologist (EP) because of their potential role in supporting adopted CYP. EPs are knowledgeable about educational systems and the impact of trauma and neglect on well-being and learning. Fallon, Woods, and Rooney (2010) claim that EPs occupy a 'strategic vantage point' in terms of the social and educational contexts of CYP. In this way, EPs can provide a holistic overview of CYP's needs, which accounts for complexity and considers the interrelated systemic factors at the levels of individual, home, school and local authority (LA). The DfES (2006) recommends that EPs should be allocated specialist roles in supporting adopted CYP and LAC, positioned within multi-disciplinary teams. Multi-disciplinary working may also support school staff by increasing the clarity and consistency of professional advice.

However, research commissioned by the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) found that the scope and time allocated to EPs in supporting adopted CYP and LAC varied considerably across services (Osborne, Norgate, & Traill, 2009). In addition, EP work with LAC was often prioritised compared to post-adoption support. This may reflect how LA's prioritise work in this area or due to adoption support teams commissioning private psychologists. Moreover, there has

been little research exploring the effectiveness of EP work in improving outcomes for adopted CYP. One study that evaluated EP practice in relation to LAC found that EP input was associated with a reduction in placement breakdown, and foster carers valued the specialist advice and support offered (Gibbs, Sinclair, Wilson, 2004). I would argue that further research is required to gather the views of adoptive families to evaluate and inform future EP practice in this area.

1.0.5. The Focus of this Review

Few studies have researched the qualitative experiences of education for adopted CYP and their families. However, several recent UK doctorate theses have looked at adopted CYP's experience of their education and social development (Crowley, 2015); supporting adopted parents communication with school staff (Lyons, 2016) and exploring teacher constructions of adoption (Stewart, 2017). Due to the relatively sparse qualitative literature in this area, my systematic review focuses on the educational experiences of adopted CYP, from the perspective of adopted children, their parents, and teachers.

1.1. Method

1.1.1. Review Methods

The systematic literature review was conducted using meta-ethnography. Induction and Interpretation are central concepts in meta-ethnography and the researcher is encouraged to translate ideas and concepts, in order to produce a synthesis of different studies (Britten et al., 2002). Meta-ethnography prioritises the preservation of meaning and interpretations and explanations included in the original studies are treated as data (Britten et al., 2002). I utilised a modified version of the seven phases of meta-ethnography outlined by Noblit and Hare (1988). Table 1 below includes an outline of the process of a meta-ethnography suggested by Noblit and Hare (1988).

Table 1: Phases of Meta-ethnography (Noblit & Hare, 1988)
Phase 1 Starting: Identifying an intellectual interest that qualitative research might inform.
Phase 2 Searching: Deciding what is relevant to the initial interest.
Phase 3 Reading the studies
Phase 4 Determining how the studies are related
Phase 5 Translating the studies into one another
Phase 6 Synthesising translations
Phase 7 Expressing the synthesis: My line of argument

1.1.2. Phases of the Systematic Review and Meta-ethnography

1.1.3. Phase 1: Starting

My initial interest in this area arose from my previous role as a teaching assistant (TA) in a residential school. Within this role, I felt that some adopted CYP had fallen through the gaps and were not entitled to the same support from external professionals as LAC. This lack of support meant that some parents did not feel able to meet their children's complex needs and led to some adoptive placements breaking down and CYP moving into full-time residential care. I was initially interested in how EPs and social workers can collaborate to support adopted CYP and their families. However, to my knowledge, at the time of writing this review, there were no peer-reviewed articles exploring this topic. Therefore, I decided to broaden my review question and focus on the educational experiences of adoptive CYP and how EPs can support schools and adoptive families.

1.1.4. Phase 2: Searching

Initial broad searches of the literature provided an estimate of the size of the literature field and helped to focus the review question. From this initial search it became apparent that there were only a few articles included in educational psychology journals. Therefore, the search was widened to include journals from social work and the medical profession. Four electronic databases were searched to find studies that explored the experiences of adopted CYP in education and the support families/school received. The databases searched from July to January 2019 were: Scopus, Psychinfo, ERIC, EBSCO and Education Database. Please see Table 2 below which includes a list of terms I deemed the most appropriate to locate

studies related to the systematic review question. The search terms were kept as broad as possible without creating an unsearchable number of results.

Table 2: Search Terms
Adopt*, Child*, Parents, Domestic, International
Educational Psycholog*, School psycholog*, School, Education, High schools, Primary schools, Middle schools, Nursery schools

(*including suffix variations of the word)

Searches using a combination of the terms above generated a wide number of studies, including irrelevant studies. Therefore, inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to screen studies. The inclusion criteria are a set of agreed conditions that studies must meet to be included in the systematic review. Studies that did not meet these criteria were excluded (see table 3 below).

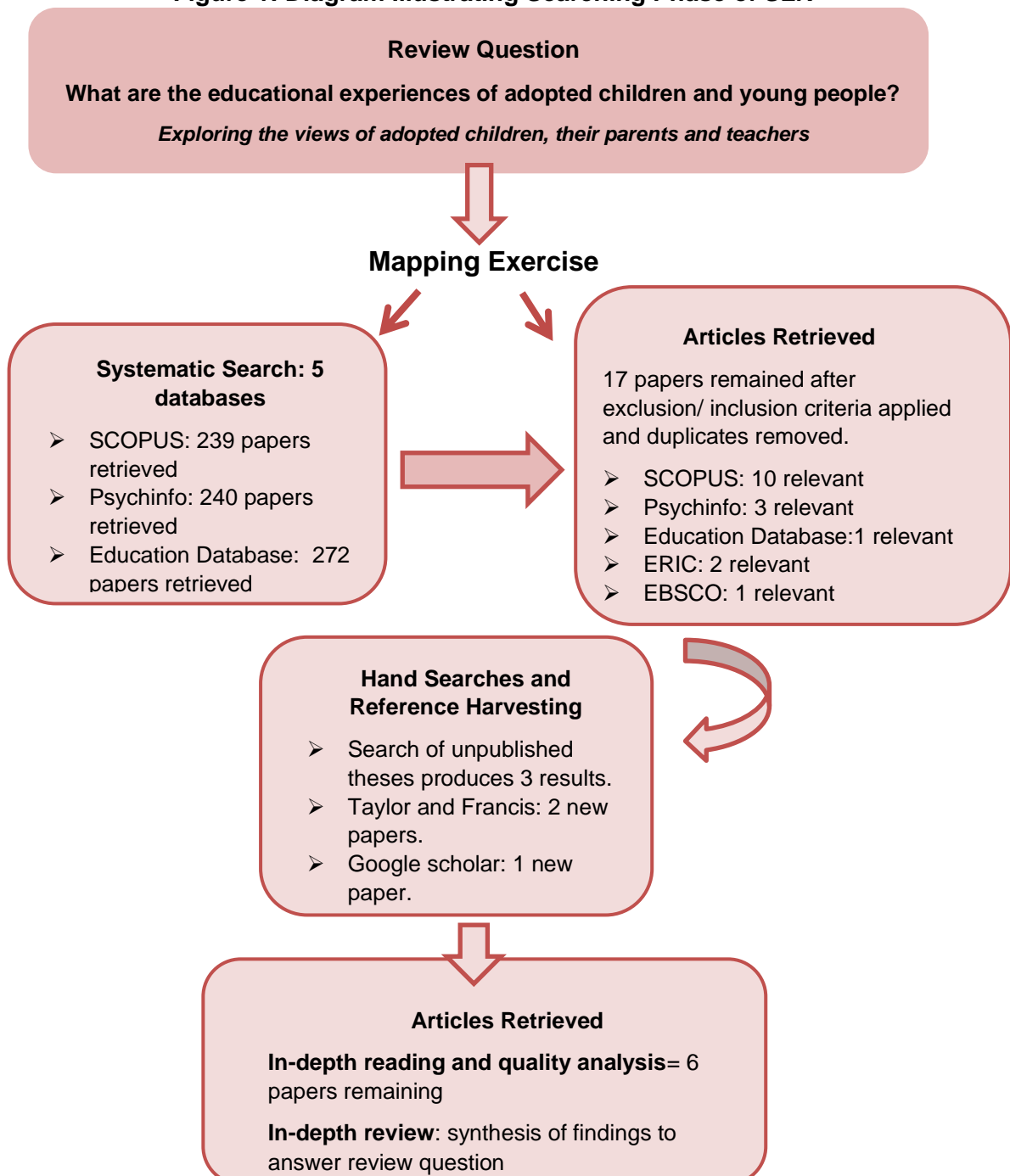| Table 3: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria		
Inclusion Criteria	**Exclusion Criteria**	**Reasoning**
Qualitative or mixed method studies	**Quantitative Studies**	This project is focusing on the educational experiences of adopted CYP and/or the views and perceptions of their parents and teachers
Only papers published after 2000	**Studies published prior to 2000**	This period was chosen as UK government publications began to emphasise the importance of support for adopted CYP around this time
Studies published in English	**Studies published in other languages**	Accessibility
Research conducted in Western countries	**Research conducted in non-western countries**	Similarity of education culture and socio-economic contexts

Table 4: Details of the Papers included in this Systematic Literature Review

Title	Author	Published	Year	Journal	Overview	Sample	Data collection	Study Type
Exploring the views and perceptions of adopted young people concerning their education and social development: an interpretative phenomenological analysis	Crowley, C	England	2019	Educational Psychology in Practice	Perspectives of adopted CYP	4 CYP aged between 10-16 years	Semi-structured interviews	Qualitative data analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
Lesbian, Gay and Heterosexual Adoptive Parents' Perceptions of Inclusivity and Receptiveness in Early Childhood Education settings	Goldberg, A.E; Black, K; Sweeney, K; Moyer, A	US	2017	Journal of Research in Childhood Education	Experiences of lesbian/gay and heterosexual adoptive parents in respect to school inclusivity and responsiveness.	45 lesbian, gay and heterosexual couples	Telephone Interviews	Mixed methods Qualitative data analysed using Thematic Analysis
Jasper's story: 'Letting me down and picking me up'- one boy's story of despair and hope at primary schools in England	Gilling, A	England	2014	Adoption and Fostering	Experience of one adopted young person's experience at two primary schools in England	One case study of an adopted child aged 12 years old	Autoethnography	Qualitative data which includes anecdotal and personal experience
Education: The views of adoptive parents	Cooper, P; Johnson, S	England	2007	Adoption and fostering	Parents/adopted CYP experiences of their education and support received from school and other agencies	Parents of 141 adopted children (aged 1-16+)	Postal survey via questionnaires	Quantitative data from questionnaire ratings
Adopted children and the transition from primary to secondary school: an examination of pupil, parent and teacher views	King	England	2009	Children's workforce development council	Focuses on adopted CYP transitioning from primary to secondary school and how schools can support children during this time	20 parents and 11 children returned questionnaires. Focus-groups included six adoptive parents and four secondary school teachers	Questionnaire, focus groups and semi-structured interviews.	Qualitative data
An Examination of the Impact of Permanency on Young Adult's Special Education Experiences	Hill, K and Koester, S	US	2015	National Association of social workers	Examines the impact of adoption on the educational experiences of adolescents with SEND	Parents of 10 children	Semi-structured Interviews with parents of adopted children and review of IEP's from before/after child was adopted	Interviews coded using content analysis

1.1.5. Phase 3: Reading the Studies, and Determining how the Studies are Related

Figure 1. below illustrates the searching phase of the systematic literature review. 17 papers remained after applying exclusion and inclusion criteria and removing duplicates. As suggested by Noblit and Hare (1988), I began by reading each of the remaining 17 papers in depth and analysed the quality of the papers by following the process of a critical synopsis as outlined by Wallace and Wray (2016). An example of this is presented in Appendix 1. After completing in-depth reading and quality analysis 6 papers remained (see table 3 above for detailed information about the 6 papers included in the systematic literature review).

Figure 1: Diagram Illustrating Searching Phase of SLR

Review Question

What are the educational experiences of adopted children and young people?

Exploring the views of adopted children, their parents and teachers

Mapping Exercise

Systematic Search: 5 databases

➢ SCOPUS: 239 papers retrieved
➢ Psychinfo: 240 papers retrieved
➢ Education Database: 272 papers retrieved

Articles Retrieved

17 papers remained after exclusion/ inclusion criteria applied and duplicates removed.

➢ SCOPUS: 10 relevant
➢ Psychinfo: 3 relevant
➢ Education Database:1 relevant
➢ ERIC: 2 relevant
➢ EBSCO: 1 relevant

Hand Searches and Reference Harvesting

➢ Search of unpublished theses produces 3 results.
➢ Taylor and Francis: 2 new papers.
➢ Google scholar: 1 new paper.

Articles Retrieved

In-depth reading and quality analysis= 6 papers remaining

In-depth review: synthesis of findings to answer review question

1.1.6. Phase 4: Determining how the Studies are Related

I then examined the remaining 6 papers for key concepts and ideas and kept a record of recurring concepts (similar to the process outlined by Britten et al., 2002). As noted by Noblit and Hare (1988), the phases of a meta-ethnography are fluid and dynamic. Thus, I began to compare papers and notice commonalities and juxtapositions between concepts. Once I generated a list of themes that I felt fully represented the papers, I then began to group them into overarching themes. These themes and corresponding original terms/interpretation used by the authors are presented in appendix 2. Each row of the table is labelled, and I aimed to use terminology that encompassed all the relevant concepts from each paper. My line of argument is developed through considering each concept and author interpretation in turn.

1.1.7. Phase 5 and 6: Translating the Studies into One Another and Synthesising

Next I began comparing themes across papers (Noblit & Hare, 1988). Noblit and Hare (1988) distinguish between different levels of interpretation, and reference Schütz's (1962) concept of first order (the participants' interpretation), second order (the researchers' interpretation) and third-order constructs (the researchers' interpretations of the original authors' interpretations). However, in line with Toye et al. (2014) and Greig (2017), I would argue that the distinction between first- and second-order constructs is unclear. Accordingly, although first-order constructs are supposed to represent the participants own interpretations, the words are included by the author to illustrate their own second-order interpretations. Thus, Greig (2017) proposes that first-order constructs are the author's interpretation of participant voice and second-order constructs are the author's interpretation of what the participant meant. Consequently, I have merged first- and second-order interpretations as one. Similarly, to Atkins et al. (2008) I found that my 'initial broad groupings of themes was gradually refined by merging and collapsing categories' (p.3) that I felt best represented the data. I was then able to infer a line of argument synthesis that represents my personal construction and interpretation of the findings (see Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion).

1.2. Findings and Discussion (Phase 7: Expressing the Synthesis)

From the meta-ethnography, five themes arose as significant factors contributing to the educational experiences of adopted CYP; from the perspectives of parents, teachers and adopted CYP. These themes are presented in figure 2 below.
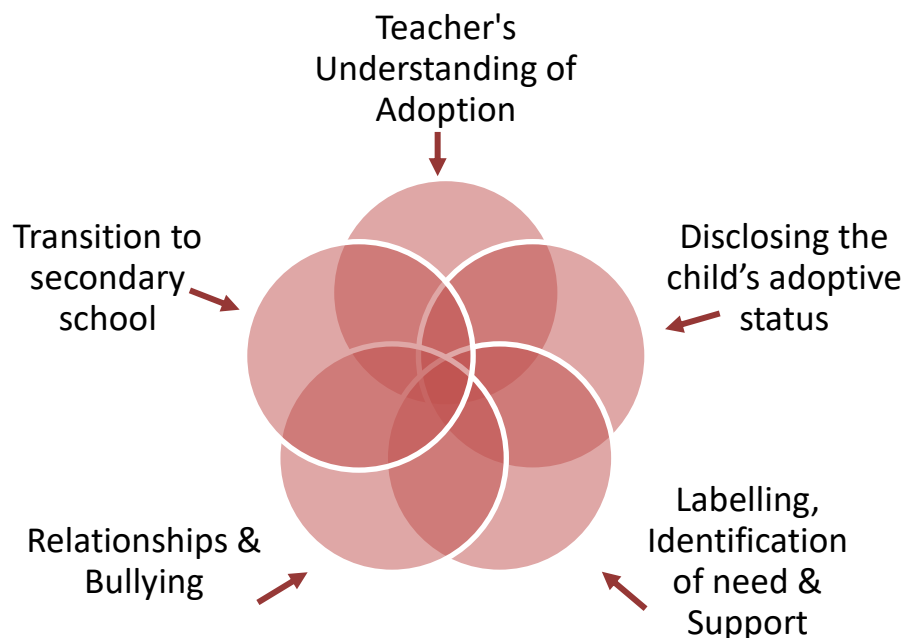
Figure 2: *Themes contributing to adopted CYP's educational experiences*

1.2.1. Teacher's Understanding of Adoption

This was the most prominent theme and featured across five of the six studies. Some adoptive parents spoke about how teachers had not explicitly integrated adoption into the curriculum and discussions (Goldberg, Black, Sweeney, & Moyer, 2017). In several cases this was interpreted positively by parents and as affirmation that teachers viewed their family as "normal" (Goldberg et al., 2017). However, other parents felt that this represented a larger problem of teachers not acknowledging diversity. Parents reported that a lack of awareness about adoption manifested itself in insensitive assignments and activities such as creating a family tree (Goldberg et al., 2017). Correspondingly, research has found that failure to sensitively include adoption in the curriculum can create feelings of isolation for adopted CYP (Barratt, Choi, & Li, 2011). However, some parents described ways in

which teachers explicitly acknowledged adoption and different family structures through reading stories about adoptive families, interracial families or same-sex parents and modifying classroom activities (Goldberg et al., 2017). In King's (2009) study, teachers spoke about sensitively modifying the curriculum for example researching the history of the school, rather than family history.

Additionally, some parents felt that teachers lacked understanding of their child's needs (Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Gilling, 2014; Goldberg et al., 2017) and several commented that they had to "fight" for recognition (Cooper & Johnson, 2007). King (2009) reported that some teachers lacked understanding about in utero and early post-natal abuse and the impact of separation that could be experienced by CYP regardless of the age they were adopted. Moreover, in correspondence to the assumption noted by Langton (2017) that adoption is a 'happy ending'; several parents provided examples of confronting teacher remarks that adoption involved "the rescuing of children" and parents were "saints for adopting" (Goldberg et al., 2017).

Parent's believed that a lack of understanding from teachers led to poor judgements such as negatively labelling behaviour as naughty and deliberative (Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Gilling, 2014). Moreover, parents felt that this misunderstanding led to teachers setting low expectations, which became self-fulfilling for their child (Cooper & Johnson, 2007). Psychological theories such as locus of control (Rotter, 1975) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008) are applicable here. Accordingly, low teacher expectations may have significant implications for adoptive CYP's self-efficacy (Schunk, 1991), motivation (Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998) and aspirations (Gutman & Akerman, 2008). This finding may be reflective of a lack of training for school staff on the impact of trauma and loss. In addition, teachers may not be aware of a child's adoptive status as this information is not always shared (King, 2009; Taymans et al., 2008). Cooper and Johnson (2007) argue that positive change can be promoted if school staff adopt a positive and understanding attitude. Research has also called for school staff to receive training to increase awareness about adoption related issues (Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Gilling, 2014).

Hill and Koester's (2015) study looked for differences in the language and content of pre- and post-adoption individual education plans (IEPs). The researchers found that post-adoption IEP's were more personalised and focused on goals and

future career plans. Parents also felt that post-adoption IEPs had a more respectful tone. The authors propose that adoption and having a key adult who is invested in CYP's education promotes positive educational outcomes and inclusion in school. This corresponds to findings that adoptive parents often hold higher aspirations for CYP in their care than foster carers (Martin & Jackson, 2002; Wijedasa & Selwyn, 2011). This may be because, for many, adoption represents permanency and security, whereas foster care is designed to be temporary. Thus, some foster carers may attempt to psychologically protect themselves to lessen feelings of emotional distress when CYP leave their care, contributing to a lack of investment in children's education. This may also be a factor contributing to the expectations held by teachers of adopted CYP and LAC.

1.2.2. Disclosing the Adoptive Status

Some parents decided not to share their child's adoption with school and explained this was because they didn't feel it was "relevant" or a "big deal" (Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Goldberg et al., 2017; King, 2009). However, many parents did decide to inform a range of school staff (Cooper & Johnson, 2007; King, 2009). Parents explained that they wanted teachers to be aware in case an issue should arise (Goldberg et al., 2017; Goldberg & Smith, 2014; King, 2009); whilst others informed school after issues had arisen (Gilling, 2014; Goldberg et al., 2017). Others were keen for teachers to adopt a more proactive approach and to put specific forms of support in place (Goldberg et al., 2017; King, 2009).

Further reasons for disclosure included being in an open adoption and ensuring teachers used appropriate language such as "birth mum" (Goldberg et al., 2017). Additionally, Goldberg et al. (2017) found that several parents engaged in what they term "implicit disclosure"; whereby parents felt the adoption was "obvious" because of their status as two mums/dads or because parents were a different race from their child. Studies frequently used the term disclosure to describe the process of adoptive parents and CYP telling others about the adoption. However, I would argue that the term disclosure can have negative connotations and implies that the individual has hidden information which they have chosen to reveal to others (Jourard & Lasakow, 1958).

Many parents felt that informing the school had been beneficial (Cooper & Johnson, 2007; King, 2009). However, a few reported hostility from other parents,

bullying and a lack of understanding from school staff (Gilling, 2014; King, 2009). In addition, some parents expressed uncertainty about who to share this information with and how to ensure it was disseminated (King, 2009). It will be interesting to explore whether this finding is still prevalent after the Children and Social Work Act (2017) proposed that schools must have a designated member of staff for promoting the attainment of adopted CYP.

1.2.3. Labelling, Identification of Need and Support

Parents reported that some adopted CYP experienced low self-esteem, problems with food, bullying, difficulties maintaining friendships, communication difficulties, sensory and physical needs and concentration and organisational difficulties (Gilling, 2014; Hill & Koester, 2015). Diagnostic labels such as special educational needs (SEN), Attention- Deficit- Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FASD) and Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD) were referred to by parents to categorise and explain their child's difficulties (Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Crowley, 2019; Gilling, 2014; Hill & Koester, 2015). Furthermore, in Hill and Koester's (2015) study adoption is portrayed positively as a vehicle to pursue further testing and identify misdiagnosis.

Some parents and researchers held the assumption that labels such as attachment disorder and ADHD led to CYP receiving the "best" support in school (Hill & Koester, 2015). However, in other studies, labelling influenced how school staff, parents and researchers described adopted CYP and their needs. Accordingly, in some cases diagnostic labels were associated with othering and within-child interpretation of needs (Gilling, 2014). Thus, within-child approaches such as therapy were sometimes perceived by staff as a "magic cure" (Crowley, 2019; Gilling, 2014). In addition, several parents spoke of the benefits of medication in managing their child's behaviour (Hill & Koester, 2015).

Parents in King's (2009) study found it hard to distinguish whether their child's behaviour was "normal" or because they were adopted. Similarly, teachers warned against generalising needs and instead proposed that support should be tailored to individual children (King, 2009). Despite this, adoptive parents and CYP generally felt that adoption was associated with additional difficulties that required additional support.

1.2.4. Relationships and Bullying

The strongest theme to emerge for CYP was relationships with others (Cooper & Johnson, 2007; King, 2009). Adopted CYP's experience of peer relationships varied, with some having well-established positive relationships and others finding relationships challenging and anxiety provoking (Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Crowley, 2019). Correspondingly, 32% of parents in Cooper's (2007) study raised concerns about their child's friendships. Crowley (2019) suggests that secure attachments to adoptive parents and self-belief were associated with the development of positive relationships. On the other hand, relationship difficulties were attributed to insecure attachment patterns and emotional dysregulation (Crowley, 2019). Similarly, CYP often blamed their relationship difficulties on their diagnosis of attachment disorder or developmental trauma. One young person explained how the metaphor "black hole" had been used to help her understand the neurological changes that occurred in her brain as a result of early trauma (Crowley, 2019). Although this metaphor is not questioned by Crowley (2019), I would argue that it supports a deficit-model in which CYP's relationship difficulties are attributed to something missing in their brain. Moreover, one must question what impact being essentialised as containing a "black hole" has on an individual's self-belief and identity. This arguably creates a bleak outlook for CYP who have experienced trauma, and fails to acknowledge environmental factors, brain plasticity and regrowth (Wastell & White, 2012).

Additionally, Crowley (2019) does not consider the impact of labels such as "attachment disorder" on CYP's belief in their ability to form relationships. However, this assumption again promotes a within-child approach and fails to acknowledge situational and contextual factors such as school ethos in relation to inclusion, cultural diversity and belonging, and school policies regarding anti-bullying. Moreover, having a diagnosis of attachment disorder may promote a self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton, 1948), influencing the way CYP engage in interactions with others and contributing to CYP finding relationships "anxiety-provoking".

In contrast, some parents felt that adoption and children having a permanent home created more opportunities for adopted CYP to develop positive peer relationships through participating in more extra-curricular and community-based activities (Hill & Koester, 2015). Consequently, adoption was portrayed by Hill and Koester (2015) as providing CYP with increased opportunities to develop

relationships due to the expansion of social networks. This diverges from previous research which has emphasised adoption related losses such as separation from birth parents, siblings and extended family (Brodzinsky, 2011; Smith & Brodzinsky, 2002).

Other parents felt that their child's adoptive status had contributed to bullying from peers (Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Gilling, 2014).This corresponds with research by the Department for Education that found adopted CYP were at greater risk of bullying than peers (Sempik & Wijedasa, 2014). Similarly, three of the CYP in Crowley's (2019) study spoke of their experience of being bullied and experiencing peer rejection because of their adoptive status. Bullying was also associated with ethnicity and culture and one young person who attended a predominantly white school described peers asking intrusive questions about her cultural background and adoption. This led some young people to consider ways of keeping their adoption hidden.

1.2.5. Transition to Secondary School

Another key finding was transition to secondary school. Young people in King's (2009) study were generally excited about the move to secondary and the opportunity to make new friends and experience new lessons. However, several CYP described the transition to secondary as "tricky" and concerns related to bullying, having different teachers, as well as whether to tell people they were adopted (Crowley, 2019). CYP were also aware of parental concerns. Parents expressed worries about how their child would cope with changes to school staff, bullying and increasing demands on organisation skills (King, 2009). However, some parents reported that concerns had been unfounded, and they were impressed by how well their child had coped (King, 2009).

Several parents in King's (2009) study highlighted the excellent pastoral support that had been provided and valued regular contact with key staff through email or review books. However, parents were divided regarding whether their child had received additional support. Parents felt that support was allocated on a personalised basis based on individual needs, regardless of whether they were adopted. This view concurred with teachers who reported that they liaised closely with primary schools to assess whether individual CYP needed additional transition

support, but this was not put in place solely because a child was adopted (King, 2009).

Schools generally did not have lists detailing which children were adopted and were keen to avoid "prying" into what was perceived to be families' private business. Although a personalised approach clearly has merits, it could be argued that this approach is reactive rather than proactive. Research by Adoption UK (2014) has found that 79% of adopted CYP routinely feel confused and worried at school. In addition, Adoption UK (2014) found that adopted CYP are more likely to leave education without any qualifications and are 20 times more likely to be excluded from secondary school than their classmates. I hypothesise that this may be because primary schools offer a more nurturing environment with small class sizes and more consistent teaching staff. In contrast, the secondary school environment is much larger; both in terms of the physical setting and number of pupils and teaching staff. This may present more challenges to CYP who have attachment needs, organization and concentration difficulties and are going through the turmoil of adolescence and identity formation. Consequently, perhaps a proactive approach designed to be preventative and minimise difficulties may be more beneficial for many adopted CYP.

1.2.6. Conclusion

This meta-ethnography has included research focused on the educational experiences of adopted CYP, from the perspective of parents, teachers and CYP. The aim of the meta-ethnography was to synthesise findings, explore research with criticality, question assumptions and offer new interpretations. The meta-ethnography has emphasised that adopted CYP and their families are not a homogenous group, and this is highlighted in the variety of educational experiences reported. However, adopted CYP do experience unique challenges in relation to their schooling such as whether to disclose their adoptive status and a lack of understanding from others regarding the impact of early abuse and neglect.

A key assumption held by both researchers and parents was that diagnosis and labelling would lead to appropriate support. Whilst I appreciate that diagnosis may facilitate others' understanding, I have argued that it can also promote othering and a within-child model that encourages CYP to change. Labelling may also increase essentialisation of difficulties and fail to acknowledge the wider context. Additionally, diagnosis led some CYP to blame themselves and the difficulties they

experienced in school. Thus, in some cases labelling caused parents, teachers and CYP to conceptualise needs within a frame of psychopathology and deficit (Lauchlan & Boyle, 2007). Arguably, an ecological perspective that focuses on adapting the wider school environment may be more effective in facilitating inclusion and improving outcomes than trying to change an individual (Coman & Devaney, 2011). This approach should include ongoing training for professionals working with adopted CYP, focussed on improving understanding of the impact of early childhood trauma, loss, and neglect.

1.2.7. Limitations

Interpretation is central to the process of meta-ethnography (Noblit & Hare, 1988) and consequently the findings are influenced by my own experiences and subjectivity. Nevertheless, throughout the process of completing the meta-ethnography I have been transparent in the steps I have taken and the adaptations I have made (Britten et al., 2002; Greig, 2017). Additionally, I recognise that the emerging themes from this meta-ethnography cannot reflect the complexity of all adopted CYP's educational experiences. Another limitation is the lack of inclusion of the voice of children and young people in the existing literature and in the papers included in this systematic literature review. I would argue that including the voice of adopted CYP in future research is vital to gain insight into the educational experiences of this group and the support they find most helpful in school.

1.2.8. Future Research

Transition to secondary was highlighted as a significant period for adopted CYP and their families. Whilst many adopted CYP were excited about moving to secondary school, others raised concerns. This corresponds with discussions I had with adoption social workers and virtual school colleagues who highlighted that difficulties are more likely to arise for adopted CYP in secondary school. However, rather than focusing on difficulties, a strengths-based perspective, which focuses on what works well, may be more powerful. Such an approach has its roots in positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014) and aims to affect positive change by capitalising on strengths. Thus, my own research will focus specifically on what adopted CYP and their families found helpful on their transition to secondary, with the aim of supporting schools to offer a more proactive approach. In the following

chapter I discuss my epistemological and ontological stance that shaped the research process and methodology used.

Chapter Two-Bridging Document

Abstract

The bridging document provides an overview of how the systematic literature review led to the empirical research. This document offers further depth regarding aspects of the research process. It will include information about the researchers' background, personal interests and motivations and context of the research. I then discuss my epistemological and ontological stance which shaped the research process and methodology used. Finally, ethical considerations of the research process: informed consent, power dynamics and reflexivity are discussed.

2.0. Personal, Professional and Local Context of Research

Prior to starting the doctorate programme I worked as a TA in a residential school for children with complex needs. I felt that some of the adopted CYP I worked with had fallen through gaps in services despite having high levels of need (especially when in residential placement outside of area). On at least one occasion, the adoptive parents did not feel they had been given enough support to meet their child's needs. This led to the adoptive placement breaking down and the young person moving into full-time residential care at the school. My colleagues also reported that they did not have sufficient knowledge about attachment and the impact of trauma and neglect. In addition, some staff members failed to recognise that adopted CYP may have had adverse childhood experiences, despite acknowledging the impact of these for LAC. I believe this lack of knowledge contributed towards the perception that adopted CYP had found their 'happy ending' (Langton, 2017) and led to staff overlooking or dismissing the impact of ACE. My experiences in this role highlighted the need for further research to help practitioners gain a deeper understanding of the educational experiences of adopted pupils.

Furthermore, through conversations with adoption social workers and colleagues in the virtual school, transition to secondary school was highlighted as a crucial period in adopted CYP's schooling. Specifically, colleagues shared their experiences of adopted CYP doing well at primary school but then being excluded shortly after transitioning to secondary. Many previous studies have found that adopted CYP tend to achieve poorer attainment than their peers. However, these studies have largely applied quantitative methodologies focused on outcomes. As a result, little is known about the underlying processes and factors that contribute to poor educational outcomes for adopted CYP (Weeks, Hill, & Owen, 2017). There has also been a lack of consultation with adopted children and their families. Consequently, the present research utilises a qualitative framework to provide more insight into adopted CYP's experiences of transitioning to secondary school (Willig, 2012). As discussed, previous studies in this area have largely focused on negative educational outcomes. Within my own research I wanted to adopt a strengths-based perspective to explore the support mechanisms that could hopefully be used to inform and strengthen service delivery.

2.1. Interpretivist Paradigm

As a researcher, I recognise the importance of explicitly stating my ontological and epistemological views and acknowledge that my beliefs and values have shaped each stage of the research process and findings. Ontology refers to assumptions about the nature of reality and asks: 'What is there to know?' Epistemology on the other hand, refers to how and what we can know and asks: 'How can we know?' (Willig, 2013, p.13). Methodology is informed by both epistemology and ontology and describes the approach adopted by the researcher: what you do and how you do it (Willig, 2013, p.13). This research adopts a Critical Realist research paradigm. It is 'realist' because it presupposes that reality exists independently of our thoughts, views and constructions (Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson, & Norrie, 2013). Furthermore, it is 'critical' because it acknowledges that individuals hold different interpretations of reality, which are mediated through meaning-making, language, culture and our social context (Oliver, 2012). Critical realism acknowledges that attempts to describe or explain the real world are fallible and always open to critique and replacement (Scott, 2005). I have utilised this paradigm because I am interested in adoptive parents and CYP's own idiosyncratic experiences and perceptions of the transition to secondary school. I recognise that adoption exists as an intrinsically personal and emotive reality for many people. However, I also acknowledge the multiple perspectives individuals may hold in relation to that one reality due to the influence of their unique context, history, language and culture (Archer et al., 2013). I also recognise that my own prior experiences working as a TA with several adopted CYP undoubtedly shaped all stages of the research process. As previously discussed, I felt the complex needs of these young people were often not fully recognised. This underpinned my assumption that adopted CYP require additional support to meet their educational needs. Findings from my systematic literature review identified transition to secondary school as being especially important in adopted CYP's educational careers. This, together with my own experiences influenced the focus of my research to identify the supportive mechanisms associated with this crucial transition period.

2.2. Methodology

2.2.1. Rationale for Methodology

Critical realist grounded Theory (CRGT) was chosen as the methodology for my empirical research. Several reasons guided my decision to utilise this approach which will now be discussed in turn. Firstly, the research was conducted with a small sample of participants and GT is recognised as appropriate for small-scale, qualitative research designs (Denscombe, 2007). Nevertheless, so too are other qualitative methodologies such as Action Research, Thematic Analysis and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. However, unlike other qualitative approaches, GT adopts a constant comparative method of data collection which 'combines systematic data collection, coding, and analysis with theoretical sampling in order to generate theory that is integrated, close to the data, and expressed in a form clear enough for further testing' (Conrad, 1993, p.280). GT methods were developed by sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1978) who advocated constructing theories grounded in data rather than deducing testable hypotheses from existing theories (Charmaz, 2006). GT has been recognized as a helpful methodology for developing concepts, language and theory in new areas of research (Robson, 2011). Due to the sparsity of previous research focusing on the experiences of adopted CYP transitioning to secondary school; GT was identified as a helpful method of generating new theory which is grounded or rooted in the emerging data (Chong & Yeo, 2015).

2.2.2. Semi-structured Interviews

Interviews followed an unstructured format. This was facilitated by stating at the start of the interview that although I had some questions to ask, I wanted participants to speak freely about what was pertinent for them. I also utilised open questions to encourage participants to speak about their experiences in their own words. On occasion, it was necessary to revert to closed questioning to clarify responses or to support dialogue to continue. I used a prompt sheet as a reminder of the areas I wanted to cover and to guide the conversation where necessary. The prompt sheet was regularly updated and included new codes and possible lines of enquiry from previous interviews. Fielding (1994) proposes that unstructured interviews 'allow respondents to use their own way of defining the world and assumes that no fixed sequence of questions is suitable to all respondents' (p.95).

Fielding (1994) and Glaser and Strauss (1978) argue that unstructured interviews are consistent with a grounded theory methodology as they enable the researcher to discover new ground. In line with GT, the interviews became increasingly more focused as they progressed. As Wimpenny and Gass (2000) indicate, in GT 'ongoing analysis will influence the questions that are asked, with the direction of the interview becoming driven by the emerging theory' (p.1489) Thus, semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility in terms of the sequencing and type of questions and depth of exploration but also enabled data from previous interviews to inform and guide later interviews (Fielding, 1994). For example, diversity in the secondary school setting was noted as a positive for promoting feelings of belonging and connectivity. This finding has not previously been reported in relation to adopted CYP and was used to inform future interview questions.

2.2.3. Stages of Coding

According to Charmaz (2006) coding is the first step in GT where the researcher moves beyond concrete statements to make their own interpretations of the data. Charmaz (2006) states that coding is an emergent process and 'unexpected ideas…keep emerging' (p.5). Initial coding entails the researcher engaging in in-depth reading of transcripts, whilst remaining open to all possible theoretical directions. According to Charmaz (2006), initial coding should remain close to the data and the researcher should utilise labels that reflect action. Line-by-line coding was initially employed, which involves naming each line of the transcripts to identify both explicit and tacit statements and assumptions. Focused coding is the second phase and involves using the most frequent or salient labels to synthesise and explain larger segments of data. This process involves moving across interviews and making comparisons between individuals experiences, actions and interpretations (Charmaz, 2006). The final stage of coding used is referred to as theoretical coding. Theoretical coding involves the researcher identifying relationships between the codes developed during focused coding. Glaser and Strauss (1978) argue that theoretical codes 'weave the fractured story back together' (p.72). I will now discuss important ethical considerations for including the experiences of adoptive parents and CYP within my research.

2.3. Ethical Considerations within My Research

2.3.1. Parental Engagement in Policy and Education

There has been increasing recognition of the importance of engaging parents and CYP within research and education policy (Education Endowment Foundation, 2019). Studies have found that parental engagement in their children's learning is associated with improved educational outcomes (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004). Specifically, research has found that parents who hold high aspirations for their children are more involved with their education (Gutman & Akerman, 2008). However, when parental participation does not occur, parents may be positioned as "hard to reach" and as a result held responsible for lack of engagement. Such notions define the problem as existing with parents, rather than due to failure in engagement strategies adopted by schools and settings (Brackertz, 2007). Wilson (2019) proposes that this reinforces the deficit model of poverty and parenting, which suggests that individuals are responsible for their marginalized situation.

Recently, studies have approached this issue by asking "Why are schools hard to reach?" (Crozier & Davies, 2007). Researchers have found that limited opportunities for parents to share ideas and views and to partake in school culture and events can leave parents feeling disempowered (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012). This suggests that parental engagement may be related to empowerment and opportunities to participate in decision making and open communication with schools (Bryan & Henry, 2012). Goodall and Harold (2018) comment on the gap between parents and school staff in relation to experience, social class, and culture. Parents have also reported that they feel schools lack understanding of their families' context (Crozier, 2001). Gibbs and Powell (2007) report that when school staff believe they can engage more readily with the community the rate of exclusions may reduce. These findings highlight the importance of including adoptive parents' views within the present study to support their children's successful transition to secondary school.

2.3.2. Child 'Voice'

The involvement of young people in research and decision making has also been an area of growing interest nationally. Legislation such as The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) and government publications have

advocated for the rights of young people to express their views and be taken seriously (for example Department of Health (DoH), 2003). However, research has identified a gap between the UK's international commitments and what happens in practice in terms of including children's views in educational decision making (Kilkelly, 2006). Similarly, young people feel that their views are not acted on or used to influence change (Alderson, 2000). Lundy (2007) notes that potential barriers to gaining and implementing child views include adult worries that giving children more power will undermine authority and scepticism about children's capacity to make meaningful contributions to decision making. However, research has highlighted the benefits of consulting with children in improving teaching and learning and fostering a more democratic school ethos (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004). Such studies highlight the importance of listening to children and encouraging their participation in research to inform understanding, develop policy and improve existing practice (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004). I believe adopted CYP are best placed to comment on the transition support they found most helpful which underlined my decision to seek their views within the present research. I will now describe the processes I used to ensure the parents and CYP who took part in this study were fully briefed about the purpose of the research and able to give informed consent.

2.3.3. Informed Consent and Confidentiality

All participants were initially provided with an information sheet and consent form detailing the aims of the research (see appendix 3). The Guidelines outlined by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2017) remind researchers that they have an ethical duty to ensure participants have sufficient understanding about the nature of the research, so that they can make an informed decision about whether to participate. Guidelines in the BPS code (2014) state that potential participants should be given information about the research in an understandable form. Consequently, the young people invited to take part in this research were provided with a separate consent and information sheet from their parents. This was to ensure that information was provided in a clear and accessible format so that CYP could make an informed choice as to whether to participate.

Prior to commencing the interview, I verbally briefed participants, which included recapping the purpose of the research and reminding participants that they could withdraw at any stage. In addition, because CYP included within the research

were likely to be aged 16 and under, I also obtained parental consent (see Appendix 3 and 4). Moreover, Cocks (2006) reminds us that consent is an ongoing process and researchers need to remain vigilant to the child's responses, expression and body language throughout the research process. During the interviews I consciously looked for verbal and non-verbal signs of distress or frustration and would have discontinued the interviews if this had been apparent. Any identifying information referred to during the interviews has been anonymised.

2.3.4. Power Dynamics

Issues of power imbalances are also of concern when conducting research with children (Phelan & Kinsella, 2011). Scholars warn of the fine balance between reducing power imbalances and promoting children's agency whilst also avoiding forming relationships with children based on a false sense of friendship (Cocks, 2006). In relation to EP practice, Hardy and Hobbs (2017) propose that pupil voice should be used to inform practice and challenge dominant narratives. I considered these aspects when setting up and conducting interviews and the choices I made were based on efforts to make participants feel comfortable, respected and listened to. This included letting participants lead discussions and having a genuine interest in CYP's views. Moreover, a key consideration was how the research would be fed-back to participants and how the findings would be acted on (Hardy & Hobbs, 2017). In light of this, transcript excerpts were sent to participants to check they were happy for them to be included in the study. In addition, I have contacted Adoption UK and the British Association for Adoption and Fostering regarding publishing my research. I will also share my research with the LA and I hope the findings can be used to inform transition support for adopted CYP.

2.3.5. Reflexivity

Bolton and Delderfield (2018) describe reflexivity as the process of questioning our own attitudes, values and assumptions and having an awareness that others hold differing perspectives from our own. Bolton and Delderfield (2018) argue that reflexivity is an integral part of ethical action and involves examining 'how congruent our actions are with our espoused values' (p.7). Phelan and Kinsella (2011) propose that conducting ethical research with children involves the researcher maintaining an ongoing commitment to reflexivity and holding the tenets of safety, dignity, and child voice as paramount. Adopting a reflexive stance involves

researchers examining their own positionality and asking questions along the lines of 'what brings us to the project, and what we really think about children' (Nutbrown, 2011, p.11). I considered my own values and the importance I place on listening to children within my practice and ensuring that children's views and opinions are prioritised and acted upon. These values underpinned my decision to include children as participants within my research.

In order to promote my reflexivity, I kept a research diary from the outset. Memo writing is a fundamental aspect of GT and involves the researcher recording emergent concepts and theoretical ideas. I believe memo writing is not only a useful tool for capturing the complexity of interpretation and analysis but also provides a means of examining are own positionality and influence on the research. As referred to earlier, as an adult interviewing young people I was conscious of the evident power-imbalance and took steps to minimise this. However, I also recognise that my role and unfamiliarity may have influenced the information young people shared with me.

Moreover, I also acknowledge that existing literature and theory informed and guided the present research. The issue of how and when to engage with existing literature is often referred to as problematic when researchers employ GT methodology (Dunne, 2011). Opponents of conducting a literature review prior to data collection argue that it constrains the research process and contaminates interpretation and analysis (Glaser, 1992). However, this argument implicitly assumes the presence of an objective theory that exists independently of the researchers' subjective preconceived ideas and assumptions (Ramalho, Adams, Huggard, & Hoare, 2015). Ramalho et al. (2015) argue that this in turn implies that the researchers' subjectivity can be purged by appropriate research methods. From my critical realist standpoint, I agree with those who recognise that the researcher is not a neutral observer, but an epistemic subject influenced by their context and environment (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Roth & Breuer, 2003). Thus, in concordance with Corbin and Strauss (1990) I engaged with existing literature throughout the research process whilst maintaining 'an attitude of scepticism' (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p.45). In addition, reflexivity can also assist the researcher to gain a better understanding of their positioning, decision making, and rationale (Ramalho et al., 2015).

Chapter Three- Empirical Research

What works well to support adopted children and young people on their transition to secondary school?

Abstract

The conclusions of the systematic literature review informed the empirical research question: what works well to support adopted children and young people on their transition to secondary school? The empirical research uses Critical Realist Grounded Theory to analyse interviews with seven adoptive parents and three young people attending various educational settings. The conceptual categories of needing to act proactively, parents teaching professionals, shared responsibility and working as a team were important to adoptive parents' experiences of the transition period. I argue that these categories are influenced by wider school systems and culture. Secondary school was also found to offer young people a "fresh start" and opportunity to develop a new identity in relation to their adoption. Findings also highlight the importance of relational factors in supporting the transition period, such as professionals who understand, collaborative working, open communication and shared responsibility. Finally, the research findings are critically discussed in relation to existing literature and policy and implications for Educational Psychologists and future research are discussed.

3.0. Introduction

This research aims to develop the findings of the systematic literature review presented in chapter one, by exploring the experiences of adopted CYP on their transition to secondary school, from the perspectives of parents and CYP. Within this introduction, I critically discuss previous literature focusing on the transition process. I discuss why research in this area is important with reference to relevant government publications and present my own research question in response to gaps in the current literature.

3.0.1. Transition to Secondary School

The transition from primary to secondary school is often viewed as a significant period in children's schooling and described as a 'key rite of passage' for CYP (Pratt & George, 2006, p.16). However, it is often depicted in the literature as 'one of the most difficult in pupils' educational careers' (Zeedyk et al., 2003, p.67). A range of factors are likely to contribute to difficulties during transition such as changes in school, increased academic expectations, social discontinuities, pressure of developing new relationships and adjusting to biological changes of puberty (Lohaus, Elben, Ball, & Klein-Hessling, 2004; Rice, 1997).

Research has found that adopted CYP are more likely to have lower attainment than peers which is associated with difficulties making systemic transitions (Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm, & Splittgerber, 2000). In addition, CYP who have experienced early abuse and neglect have been found to experience difficulties adjusting to secondary school (Reyes, Gillock, Kobus, & Sanchez, 2000). Thus, it could be argued that transition to secondary may present with more challenges for at least some adopted CYP. Only two studies to date have included adopted CYP and their families' experiences of transition (Crowley, 2019; King, 2009). Adopted CYP included in King's (2009) study were generally excited about the transition and opportunities to make new friends but were worried about parental concerns. However, several CYP reported difficulties relating to bullying, different teachers, as well as whether to share that they were adopted (Crowley, 2019; King, 2009). Despite the relatively sparse literature in this area, research has shown that transition periods are crucial times and can enable turning points in CYP's trajectory of development (Brewin & Statham, 2011; Coffey, 2013). Consequently, further research in this area is of importance.

Previous research exploring the transition experiences of other populations such as pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and LAC have found that transition to secondary school is associated with a decline in attainment (Benner & Graham, 2009; Schwerdt & West, 2011) and deterioration in pupils' attitudes towards subjects (Deieso & Fraser, 2019). Transition has also been found to have a negative impact on pupils' wellbeing and decrease in school belongingness (Witherspoon & Ennett, 2011). On the other hand, other studies found that transition had a positive impact and was linked to improved wellbeing, related to increased autonomy and relatedness (Fortuna, 2014). Such findings contribute toward an alternative discourse within the transition literature, which is largely dominated by negative outcomes (Jindal-Snape, Cantali, MacGillivray, & Hannah, 2019).

Several protective factors have been associated with positive transition to secondary which include: familiarisation with the new school environment and staff prior to transition (Ashton, 2008); supportive and caring teachers who made learning fun (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009; Hammond, 2016); positive relationships with peers (Ashton, 2008); opportunities for identity transformation (Davis, Ravenscroft, & Bizas, 2015; Farmer, Hamm, Leung, Lambert, & Gravelle, 2011); having an older sibling who attends the same school (Mackenzie, McMaugh, & O'Sullivan, 2012); and developing relationships with older peers (Symonds & Hargreaves, 2016). The school environment has also been found to impact on transition and smaller, ethnically diverse schools promoted feelings of connectedness (Benner & Graham, 2009). Additionally, one study exploring the experiences of pupils with a diagnosis of ASC found that many students valued the clear structure and routine of secondary (Neal & Frederickson, 2016). Furthermore, studies have highlighted the importance of involving parents as equal partners to support transition and inclusion (Davis et al., 2015).

In their systematic literature review Jindal-Snape et al. (2019) comment that most studies report negative findings with few exploring the positive impact. They comment that 'this provides an unbalanced picture of the transition to secondary school' (p.40). Arguably, adopting a strengths-based perspective to transition will enable a focus on 'what works' to inform service delivery (Pulla, 2017). Consequently, this study will address the research question: 'What works well to support adopted CYP on their transition to secondary school?' In the following section, I will outline the method used to help answer this question.

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Participant Recruitment

      I chose to recruit participants through Adoption Agencies instead of schools to offer a more neutral foundation for parents to share experiences regarding their child's schooling. Participants also chose the time and location for interviews to take place (home address or county council room) to promote engagement, accessibility and provide a comfortable and non-threatening environment for data collection. In addition, CYP had the choice to be interviewed with their parents or alone and all participants chose to be interviewed alongside their parents.

3.1.2. Participants

      Participants were recruited via the adoption team newsletter, which is sent to adoptive parents and contains information about upcoming events and training. I also contacted a private adoption agency who agreed to email details of the study to parents. A total of ten participants consented to partake in the study (including seven parents and three CYP; Leo – for part of the interview – Megan and Rory). Please see Table 5 below for more detailed information about the participants in this study.

Table 5: Participant Information					
Parent Name	**Child Name**	**Age at Adoption**	**Age now**	**School**	**Year group**
(NB. All names are pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality).					
Mary	Leo	6 years	14 years	Excluded from Mainstream, attending Alternative Provision.	10
Matt & Lisa	Thomas	6 years	15 years	Mainstream Secondary	10
Natalie	Kier	3 years	17 years	College	First Year
Celia	Megan	2 years	13 years	Selective Grammar School	8
Liz & Heather	Rory	3 years	11 years	Mainstream Secondary	7

3.1.3. Procedure

      Semi- structured Interviews were conducted with all participants. Whilst I guided the interview structure, I encouraged participants to speak freely about what was pertinent for them. Interviews took place between July and November 2019. The interviews were voice recorded and stored on a password-protected computer that only the researcher had access to. All voice recordings were deleted once the

interviews had been transcribed. Excerpts included in the study were anonymised. The transcribed interviews were analysed using Critical Realist Grounded Theory (Oliver, 2012) which is described in detail in chapter two. For ease of the reader, an outline of Grounded Theory is also provided in the following section.

3.1.4. Critical Realist Grounded Theory

According to Charmaz (2006), GT approaches enable the researcher to see data in novel ways and expand on these ideas through analytic writing. The guidelines of GT are flexible and offer a set of general principles and heuristic devices to facilitate the researcher in constructing theories 'grounded' in the data itself (Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont, 2003). Glaser and Strauss (1967) propose that these principles include:

- Simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis
- Constructing analytic codes and categories from the data
- Using a constant comparative method and making comparisons during each stage of the analysis
- Advancing theory development during each step of data collection and analysis

The use of a flexible, qualitative approach enabled the exploration of the meanings parents and adopted CYP ascribed to the transition process from their own idiosyncratic perspective. The process used to analyse the interview transcripts is presented below in table 6.

Table 6. Process of Analysis

Step 1: Interview recordings were transcribed and initially coded before the next interview was conducted, and memo-writing was used to identify and record key ideas and thoughts.
Step 2: Initial codes were generated through line-by-line coding. Initial codes aim to capture possible themes and lines of enquiry suggested by the data and allows an analytical view of the participants' narrative.
Step 3: Focused codes were created by synthesising and analysing all initial codes. Focused codes capture what the researcher finds to be the most significant concepts emerging from the data.
Step 4: Finally, conceptual categories were constructed which included comparing and analysing participant's narrative, initial codes and focused codes and reference to initial ideas from memo writing.

3.2. Research Findings

As outlined above, I wanted my research to adopt a strengths-based approach with a primary focus on what had worked well to support transition to secondary. However, many of the participants shared stories regarding what had not worked for their child. I believe this may be because parents who had a negative experience of transition wanted to share their experiences in order to offload their frustration and anger as well as to inform positive change. Conversely, adopted parents and CYP who had a positive experience may have felt less inclined to come forward due to not possessing the same need or motivation for change. Despite this, I feel that the negative experiences shared can also shed light on what needs to be improved to inform service delivery. This situation relates to issues of knowledge production and power in research and raises questions about whose right it is to produce knowledge (Gibbons, 1994). As previously discussed, I am interested in adopted CYP and their parents' experience of transition and I was keen for participants to speak about what was pertinent for them. Thus, the decision was made to include both positive and negative experiences of transition with the hope that participants would be empowered to 'take rhetorical agency in their lives and…community' (Flower, 2008, p.44), rather than knowledge production being governed and dictated by the researcher. The main themes identified are: needing to act proactively, professionals who understand, shared responsibility, deciding whether to tell people I'm adopted, familiarity with the new school and valuing diversity. These themes will each be discussed in turn, with reference to excerpts taken from participant interviews.

3.2.1. Needing to Act Proactively

Table 6. Development of Theme: Needing to act proactively		
Conceptual Category →	Formed from focused → codes	Formed from initial codes →
Needing to act proactively	• Teaching ourselves and professionals • Acting proactively • Wanting support to be in place • Feeling let down • Ambiguity	• Teaching professionals • Receiving the best support • Arranging meetings • School staff unwilling to change • Teaching ourselves • Demonstrating I know what I am talking about • Asking for support to be in place • System for many not the individual • Square peg, round hole • Feeling misunderstood • Making assumptions • Needing all staff to get it • Constantly explaining • Getting the teachers on board • Helping staff understand why • Feeling blamed • Laying seeds • Engineered it • Doing the groundwork • Learning from past experiences • Taking it into our own hands • Passing on information ourselves • Parents who just do not let up • Follow-up

Being proactive was a prominent theme in many of the parent interviews. Parents described how they had acted proactively to inform the secondary school about their child's needs. Interestingly, several parents utilised terms related to construction e.g. "engineered it" and "doing the groundwork" to conceptualise their attempts to lay a positive foundation to ensure the transition was as successful as possible. This included making sure a transition plan was in place and arranging meetings with the SENCo of the secondary school to pass on information prior to their child starting school. For example, Mary commented:

> "We are very aware of how Leo is and we wanted him to receive the best support…we had numerous meetings with the secondary school, and we spoke to the SENCo, and we explained what he was like, explained, potentially, what his triggers were"

Reasons for parents acting proactively centred around wanting appropriate support for their child in secondary school and aiding staff understanding should any issues arise. Parents raised concerns about information not being shared by school staff and they described how they needed to act proactively and take responsibility. Other parents voiced regret at not being more proactive and sharing information directly with the secondary school. Lisa described this as being due to their "naïve" assumption about school's understanding of the impact of trauma and attachment. Lisa also commented that she should have prepared a presentation pack, containing professional reports about her son's developmental history and his needs.

Parents Teaching Professionals

For many parents, acting proactively meant educating school staff about the impact of trauma and neglect. However, some parents felt this should not be their responsibility and believed that staff should have received appropriate training. In Mary's account, she explains how she arranged further multi-professional meetings in an attempt to aid staff understanding after her son was repeatedly put into isolation and excluded:

> "We have had to work very hard almost becoming professionals in our own child…so that actually I can demonstrate that I know what I am talking about, that I am not paranoid"

Many parents' accounts describe the pressure of having to gain expertise about adoption related issues in order for their concerns to be accepted as true and legitimate. Correspondingly Lisa talks about the emotional drain of having to repeatedly share information with different members of staff:

> "It's rather wearing and quite depressing actually because you feel that you are constantly having to go on about negative things"

Ambiguity about Information Sharing

A common theme in many parents' accounts was a feeling of ambiguity about what happened to the information they had shared and whether it was passed to the correct people. Matt and Lisa also expressed confusion about what support was in place for their son. However, acting proactively and sharing information with school did not always lead to children receiving more support. Several parents felt that they

were not listened to and that suggestions were not acted on. For example, Natalie comments:

> "It was all written down on a bit of paper, but nobody ever looked at it, it never appeared to me that anyone took any interest in the fact he was a kid…that had this whole history"

Parents attributed this lack of support to a number of reasons such as: schools and OFSTED prioritising attainment; important information not being disseminated; inflexible and unhelpful school systems e.g. behaviourist rewards and consequences; school staff lacking understanding and staff being too overwhelmed or displaying a lack of interest and willingness to learn.

3.2.2. Professionals who Understand

Table 7. Development of Theme: Professionals who understand		
Conceptual Category ➝	Formed from focused ➝ codes	Formed from initial codes ➝
Professionals who understand	• Teachers who unpack behaviour • Understanding attachment/ developmental trauma	• Understanding attachment/developmental trauma • Individuals who get it • Not having to explain • Making a lasting impression • Going above and beyond • Curiosity • Seeing behaviour as communication • Treating children as individuals • Two-way respect • Positive connections • Feeling pleasantly shocked

Many parents, including those who shared largely negative accounts and one young person referred to individual school staff who had made a positive impact. Parents described school staff, who understood developmental trauma and attachment;

> "The pupil premium lead…she got him, she absolutely understood, she formed an attachment with him that he really accepted" (Natalie)

> "I think they made a connection with Thomas and had a fair understanding of him but in a balanced and fair way, not in a negative, blaming and shaming way" (Lisa)

Another important factor was professionals who took time to establish connections with CYP. For example, Liz and Heather describe how a head of year had made their son Rory feel really welcome by personally showing him around the school. Implicit in parents' accounts is that staff understanding facilitated space for developing positive relationships that were supportive and accepting whilst also maintaining boundaries and fairness. In addition, parents valued staff who accepted their child as an individual, could see beyond presenting behaviour and understood the underlying reasons. This involved staff displaying a degree of curiosity and motivation to explore what CYP were trying to communicate through their behaviour. Furthermore, Liz and Heather expressed relief at their first interaction with the secondary SENCo who understood their child's needs. They describe how they "nearly fell on the floor" and felt "positively shocked" after the realisation that they would no longer have to engage in a "constant battle" with school staff.

3.2.3. Shared Responsibility

Table 8. Development of Theme: Shared Responsibility		
Conceptual Category →	Formed from focused → codes	Formed from initial codes →
Shared Responsibility	• Joint problem solving • Onus on school staff • Positive relationships and open communication • Working as a team	• Building relationships • Positive school environment • Being on the same page • Going above and beyond • School staff working with us • Working as a team • Prompt responses • Sharing responsibility • Team effort • Professionals being genuine • Getting it right from the start • Resolving issues • Problem-solving together

Working as a Team

Another important factor, reported by several parents, was working together with school staff and feeling they were part of a team. Liz remarks:

> "She wanted to work with us… she instantly said: I want to work as a team".

Both Liz and Heather appeared to really value the SENCo's approach and recognised that working with school was fundamental in improving outcomes for

Rory. Both parents expressed their relief that the SENCo had explicitly recognised the importance of getting the transition right for Rory and appreciated that someone had offered to "help" them. Similarly, in Mary's account she explains how the onus of responsibility shifted from Leo to school staff when he moved from mainstream education to an alternative setting. Mary comments:

> "When we read their policies it was 'the staff will, the staff will' and I mentioned it to Pete who runs the school…and he said…we don't expect the kids to have to support themselves, that is why they are here. Whereas...for the PRU or mainstream it's all 'the student, the student'. The onus is on that person and if that person does not manage then the support is not there"

Consequently, both parents' narratives describe the relief at working together with the school and the shifting focus they had experienced from the individual to a "team effort". This narrative also appears to be underpinned by the school's ethos of the system adapting to meet the needs of the individual rather than the individual changing to fit into the system.

3.2.4. Deciding whether to Tell People I'm Adopted

Table 9. Development of Theme: Deciding whether to tell people I'm adopted		
Conceptual Category →	Formed from focused → codes	Formed from initial codes →
Deciding whether to tell people I'm adopted	• Secondary school as a fresh start • Sharing too much information • Standing out as different and building relationships	• Making connections • The benefit of hindsight • Oversharing • Deciding who to tell • Independence versus offering guidance • Insensitive support • Keeping it to myself • A fresh start • Standing out as different • Being open and chatty • Feeling pressurized • Isolated from peers • Others misunderstanding • Keeping the adoption to myself • Information spreading • Having a conversation • Regret • Your story, no one else's

A key transition decision for adopted CYP was whether to share their adoption with peers. In several interviews, individuals explained how past experiences had informed their decision. For example, Mary talks about her son, Leo telling peers about his two biological brothers:

> "He told them he had two brothers and they didn't believe him. I think this was Leo trying to make a connection with the other children, but the teaching staff didn't carry it through, and it became a further course of isolation"

Mary felt that school had not supported Leo when he had shared information about his adoption. This had resulted in him being further ostracised from his peers despite his attempts to connect with them and may have contributed to Leo's current stance on keeping his adoption to himself.

Over-Disclosure and the Benefit of Hindsight

Several parents felt that their children had been too open about their adoption and had told peers "everything". Natalie felt this was partly due to her son needing to be "noticed for something". Correspondingly, Megan spoke of how she had told "everyone" she was adopted in primary school, because it made her "different". Parents and CYP gave two main reasons for over-disclosure. Firstly, to stand out as different from peers and secondly, to develop new relationships and strengthen existing connections. However, a common thread is a sense of regret at over sharing. Several young people commented that with hindsight they would have been more selective about whom they informed and described telling everyone as a "mistake".

Secondary School as a Fresh Start

Megan's mum explains how secondary school was a chance to start again and an opportunity for Megan to portray herself in a new way. Celia remembers;

> "We did have a conversation about 'this is a new start for you'… we've always said this is your story, it's no one else's…and one of the things I distinctly remember saying…is being willing to talk about it is good but don't let it define you".

In Celia's account there appears to be a fine balance between encouraging Megan to own her story and make independent decisions about how much information to share, whilst also offering advice and guidance. This need to guide and offer advice seemed to be underlined by parental worries about the possible negative

consequences of sharing such as others misunderstanding adoption and "turning it into something it isn't". In contrast to Leo, both Megan and Rory state that they are quite open about adoption and are not "bothered" about people knowing;

> "Before you start, I was trying to make the decision do I tell people, do I not? And I wasn't bothered and if they asked then I told them…" (Megan)

> "I am absolutely wide open to talk about that…nobody actually takes any notice of it which is fine" (Rory)

Megan also likes to keep some information about her adoption private because she feels that others "don't need to know everything". It appears that Megan's previous negative experiences at primary school have influenced her current choices to keep some information to herself. However, Megan remarks that sharing her adoption was taken out of her control when a teacher approached during a Citizenship lesson about family. Megan comments;

> "Obviously everyone wants to know what the teacher is talking to you about…and it just spread and it's like urghh".

In addition, Megan refers to peers in secondary school pressurizing her to share more information:

> "Everyone wants to know everything so it's like as soon as you shut yourself in, it doesn't really work because they're like "no, no, you have to tell, I dare you" and it's like no!".

3.2.5. Familiarity with the New School

Table 9. Development of Theme: Familiarity with the new school		
Conceptual Category ➡	**Formed from focused** ➡ **codes**	**Formed from initial codes** ➡
Familiarity with the new school	• Familiarity and Building Confidence • Opportunities to shine • Establishing connections	• Transition events • Enhanced transition • Getting to know people • Focusing on strengths • Building positive relationships • Familiarity with the school • Summer clubs • Making connections • Finding a niche • School as a positive environment • Enabling children to shine • Easing the transition • Feeling relaxed

Enhanced Transition and Finding a Niche

Some parents spoke positively about enhanced transitions to secondary school including: transition meetings, summer clubs and additional introduction days to familiarise CYP with the school environment. For example, Liz and Heather spoke about a summer holiday club organised by the secondary school. Specifically, they valued how the transition event had drawn on Rory's strengths and enabled him to "shine". This focus on strengths appeared to be motivated by parental concerns about the impact of negative experiences in primary school. Rory had found many aspects of formal learning challenging and his parents recognised the importance of Rory finding a niche where he could flourish:

> "We knew if he was going to succeed at secondary school,
> based on what we've known at primary school, we had to find
> him a little niche where he could shine, in case everything else
> fell around him".

Parents also felt that transition events enabled CYP to build connections with school staff and peers. Parents reported that events had eased children's worries about starting secondary school as they had become familiar with the school environment, several staff members and peers. Moreover, the events were often attended by older school children who appeared to adopt a mentoring role once new pupils started in Year 7. In addition, the event ended with a show which parents were invited to and Liz and Heather appreciated the opportunity to build a positive relationship with the school in a relaxed environment.

Continuity

Continuity was also referred to as an important factor. Liz and Heather reported that Rory's form tutor was the head of performing arts and had helped run the transition event. Thus, Rory had developed some positive connections prior to starting in Year 7 and secondary school staff had made thoughtful adjustments to allow these relationships to grow. The SENCo had also recommended that Rory be part of the nurture group. The group consisted of reduced class sizes and continuity is promoted as children remain together during the school day. Liz remarks:

> "He's with these children all day so there's not a pressure for
> him to be constantly thinking who am I with? … it's almost like,
> Year 6 replicated within secondary school, which is working
> really well for him"

Interestingly, Liz uses the word "replicated" to highlight how the secondary school had tried to create a nurturing and safe space within an environment which is often large, noisy and can be overwhelming for many children. Other parents also recognised the value of continuity but felt that this was lacking in their children's secondary schools. Several parents described how they had to repeatedly make new relationships with staff as their children progressed through secondary.

Feeling Relaxed about the Transition

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that not all parents felt that an enhanced transition was necessary. Indeed, Celia spoke of how she and her husband were proud of their daughter's resilience and confidence and did not have concerns about her transition. Celia remarks;

> "Megan's super confident…and we've always felt really pleased…that whilst other parents were stressing about everything; "we're the parents of the adopted kid and we're not stressing about anything because she will just go out there and get on with it"

Celia's account implies that a commonly held perception of adopted CYP is that they have greater difficulties and require more support than their peers. As previously indicated, differences in parents' accounts underline that adopted families are not a homogenous group. Thus, despite areas of commonality in adopted families' experiences of the transition period; individuals' experiences are of course idiosyncratic. As a result, transition support should also be planned on an individual basis and centred on individual strengths and needs.

3.2.6. Valuing Diversity

Table 10. Development of Theme: Valuing Diversity		
Conceptual Category ➡	Formed from focused ➡ codes	Formed from initial codes ➡
Valuing Diversity	• False image of family • Being with people like me • Access to a new world • Knowledge of others who are adopted	• Small, rural school • Predominantly white • Not representative • No such thing as a perfect family • Everyone has issues • Blended versus nuclear families • Bigger school • Shared interests • Able to be myself • Access to a new world

The last theme, which I feel is particularly pertinent to the research's location, is valuing diversity. Several parents spoke about their children's small, rural primary schools, which were predominantly white and did not reflect the diversity of society. Celia comments:

> "There's not that much in the way of kind of blended families or gender issues…I never knew if there was another kid in her school who was adopted. I would of liked to have known that"

Celia shared concerns that this lack of diversity portrayed a false image of family structures, whereby traditional, nuclear families were presented as the norm. Inherent in Celia's account is a desire to connect or at least have knowledge of other adopted families within school. This may come from an underlying feeling of difference or lacking common ground with nuclear families and biological parents. In this regard, moving to secondary school was viewed positively by parents as it provided the opportunity to meet new people from different backgrounds:

> "A couple of friends she had at primary school just seemed to have these perfect lives…and it worried me…Actually you get out there, you go to a bigger school and you realise you know, everybody's struggling with something" (Celia)

Parents generally felt that the secondary school community was more diverse, and this enabled CYP to develop a more representative perception of family life. In addition, there is a sense within several parents' accounts that secondary school also allowed CYP to be themselves and build friendships with children who have similar interests.

3.3. Discussion

In this section I consider how the findings from the present study compare with existing literature focusing on the transition from primary to secondary school. I will then discuss limitations of the study and implications for future research and EP practice. As discussed, the rationale for conducting this research was to add to the small existing body of literature in this area. The findings of this study provide insight into the views and perceptions of a small number of adopted CYP and their families regarding the transition process. Only by listening to the experiences of adopted families can we increase our understanding of what works well to support this crucial

transition. The research utilised a strengths-based perspective to identify what supports adopted CYP. Consequently, I will start by discussing elements of the transition process which parents and CYP felt worked well, before moving on to consider areas for development.

3.3.1. Relationships-Working as a Team and Shared Responsibility

In correspondence to King (2009) findings, a crucial part of transition support included building positive relationships with school staff. The findings of the present study extend previous research by providing detail about the quality of these relationships and specific attributes that parents found beneficial. Accordingly, parents appreciated school staff who:

- Understood developmental trauma and attachment
- Took the time to establish connections with CYP
- Treated the child as an individual
- Took a fair and balanced approach
- Were able to see past presenting behaviour to explore underlying reasons
- Recognised the importance of the transition period

Working as a team was also fundamental to the success of parent-school staff relationships. Crucial here is the notion of shared responsibility and the onus shifting from individuals to a team effort and systems adapting to meet the needs of individuals. This corresponds to research by Davis et al. (2015) which highlights the importance of involving parents as equal partners in order to support the transition and inclusion of children with additional needs. Pugh, Alpin, De'Ath, and Moxon (1987) identify parent – teacher relationships as existing along a continuum from non-participation, through support, participation and partnership to control. It could be argued that often schools emphasise parent participation and respect for parents rather than partnership and power-sharing (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2001). However, parents in the present study clearly valued working collaboratively with schools and being jointly involved in decision-making and problem-solving.

3.3.2. School Environment- Familiarity, Continuity and Diversity

Familiarity with the new school environment also supported transition. Similarly, to previous studies (Ashton, 2008; King, 2009) parents and CYP spoke positively about enhanced transitions, which included meetings with the secondary school, extra induction days and transition events. In addition to existing research,

parents also appreciated opportunities to familiarise themselves with the new school. In particular, parents valued the chance to establish relationships with school staff in positive situations e.g. attending events. In agreement with previous research, continuity was also referred to as an important factor. This was discussed in relation to continuity of CYP's relationships with school staff but also in terms of schools replicating the nurturing environment of primary school through reduced class sizes and consistent teaching staff. Parents also appreciated the diversity of secondary school, especially compared to previous experiences in small, rural primary schools. Parents felt that secondary school was more representative of the real world and provided their children with opportunities to meet new people with similar interests. This corresponds with findings from Benner and Graham (2009), that ethnically diverse schools promoted feelings of connectedness. However, this finding has not previously been reported in relation to adopted CYP.

Figure 3 below illustrates how the research findings can be directly mapped onto Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Model. This model illustrates how the various support mechanisms identified interact and influence each other at different levels to support the transition to secondary school for adopted CYP.
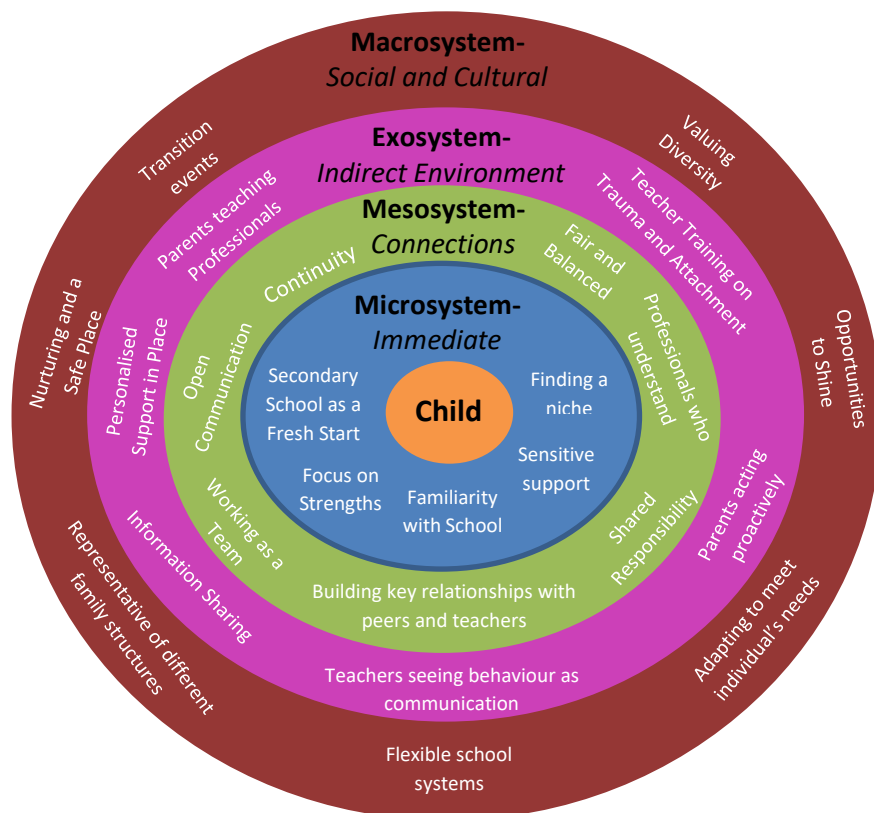

Figure 3: **Ecological Model illustrating transition support mechanisms for adopted CYP.**

The findings illustrate that the wider social and cultural environment of the school support the transition process if it values diversity, is representative of different family structures and individual's from different backgrounds and adopts flexible systems which adapt to meet the needs of the individual. This wider environment creates a culture which supports a child centred approach in which teachers view behaviour as a form of communication and fosters open communication between parents and teachers and working as a team. At a microsystemic level, these wider systems and support mechanisms influence a focus on children's strengths and the implementation of sensitive support in school. At a macrosystemic level, it could be argued that many of the factors identified as helpful in supporting the transition to secondary for adopted CYP could generalise to any pupil. However, within the adopted CYP's immediate environment and connections with others, the degree to which they need familiarity, continuity and key relationships exceeds what would usually be in place for a child in mainstream education.

3.3.3. Areas for Development

In contrast to previous research, several parents reported feeling relaxed about the transition process and felt proud of their child's resilience and confidence. Interestingly, these parents recognised that this might be an unusual feeling to have as parents of an adopted child. Other parents expressed concern about the transition to secondary school, in line with previous research by King (2009). In the present study, parental concerns were manifested in attempts to ensure the correct support was in place for their child e.g. parents arranging transition meetings with different professionals. Parents who did not take a proactive approach admitted feeling "naïve" about the support arrangements in place for their child's transition. Parents also reported feeling uncertain about what happened to information once it was shared with schools, which relates to findings by King (2009).

In correspondence with Brackertz (2007) several parents felt that schools blamed them for the child's difficulties, rather than failure of inflexible school systems which did not meet their child's needs. Relatedly, some parents felt disconnected from schools due to limited opportunities to partake in positive aspects of school culture (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2012). Parental interactions with school staff generally occurred following a problem situation and, as a result, interactions were

largely dominated by a negative discourse of difficulties, blame and parents teaching school staff about their child's needs. Parents also acknowledged the lack of diversity in small, rural primary schools, which may have also added to feelings of disconnect and perceptions that schools lacked understanding of their families' context (Crozier, 2001).

3.3.4. Limitations of the Research

There are several identified limitations related to the design and methodology of this research, which will now be discussed. In correspondence with much qualitative research, the present study featured a small sample of seven parents and three CYP. Consequently, the degree to which findings can be generalized may be limited. Furthermore, I was the sole interpreter and consequently research findings will be influenced by my own interpretations and assumptions. However, the study has achieved its aim of exploring adopted families' experiences of the transition process to contribute to service delivery in one LA. The study made no claims regarding the generalisability of findings to other settings. Despite this, I have demonstrated that the themes identified in this study correspond to existing research in this area.

In addition, only one interview was carried out with each participant and consequently findings may represent a snapshot of participants' experiences. Another important consideration is the fact that several parents were interviewed together, and all CYP chose to be interviewed alongside their parents. Thus, this may have influenced their responses or restricted the degree to which they felt they could be open and honest. However, the participants appeared comfortable during the interviews and provided rich accounts of their transition experiences. Future research may benefit from adopting a longitudinal approach and exploring transition at different points throughout schooling such as pupils starting in Year 9 when GCSE teaching begins. Longitudinal studies would provide further detail about what supports adopted CYP during significant periods in their educational careers.

3.3.5. Implications for Educational Psychology Practice

In the following section, I consider the implications of this research for EP practice. In addition to research by Crowley (2019) and King (2009), the present study has emphasised that adopted parents often experience stress and worry in relation to their children transitioning from primary to secondary. EPs are arguably

well positioned to facilitate communication between parents and school and support the development of transition plans and personalised visits which may help ease parental and child concerns (Christenson, 1999). Furthermore, EPs can emphasise the importance of close liaison between primary and secondary settings and the importance of information sharing. All parents were unclear about what happened to the information they had shared with schools. Thus, EPs could highlight the significance of ensuring all staff are informed about CYP's strengths and needs to promote a consistent and collaborative approach. EPs could also provide advice on how schools can support other transition periods and raise staff awareness about the possible impact of attachment and adverse early life experiences.

Additionally, EPs' knowledge of psychological theory, attachment and trauma makes them well placed to deliver whole school training to support the social and emotional needs of adopted CYP. Furthermore, in order to promote the implementation of training and in correspondence with theories of adult learning (Kolb, 1984) it will be important that training is supported by senior leadership, tailored to the learning needs of attendees, collaborative and offers the opportunity to discuss examples from practice (Seaton, 2018; Sundhu & Kittles, 2016). Training should also encourage staff to adopt a functional analysis approach to understanding behaviour, which views all behaviour as a form of communication or unmet need.

Findings from the present research have also emphasised the importance of EP's seeking a fine balance in applying psychological theory such as attachment theory without being deterministic. I have argued that attachment theory should not be ignored in its entirety but instead should be utilised to acknowledge the impact of the child's caregiving environment without serving to pathologize CYP for having a disruptive start to life (Slater, 2007). This should include EP's adopting the role of a critical friend and encouraging others to reflect on the perceived helpfulness of terms such as "reactive attachment disorder". In addition, a more worthwhile and hopeful approach could include identifying potential barriers to adopted CYP's sense of relatedness in school and strengthening opportunities to develop and maintain relationships with others.

Parents in the present study also emphasised the importance of staff understanding the context of behaviour and awareness of why certain strategies or approaches may be helpful. Thus, training should promote understanding of the impact of early trauma and neglect and emphasise the importance of building

positive relationships and continuity within school. EP led training and consultations should also encourage individuals to question and reflect on their beliefs and assumptions, consistent with the idea of double loop learning (Argyris, 1980). This could include inviting staff and parents to critically reflect upon their understanding of diagnostic labels such as 'attachment disorder' and their perceived usefulness. Several parents in the current study reported on the negative effects of labels such as pathologizing CYP, promoting a deficit model and within-child conceptualisation of difficulties.

The EP role could also involve advising schools on how to utilise pupil premium effectively. The DfE extended pupil premium funding in April 2014 to include adopted CYP with the aim of providing 'tailored support to raise the attainment of all adopted children' (DfE, 2014). However, several parents in the present study reported that they were uncertain about how pupil premium money was spent or felt it was used ineffectively. Several parents responded positively to school's appointment of a pupil premium lead who was able to aid staff understanding and inform positive systemic changes to school policies.

Another potential role for EPs is raising awareness of the need to be sensitive and responsive to CYP's feelings and wishes about sharing information about their adoption. Many CYP regretted disclosing "too much" information in primary and several saw secondary school as an opportunity for a fresh start. CYP appeared to appreciate discreet support and discussions with adults about how much information to share. Sadly, one young person and several parents in this study shared accounts of school staff acting insensitively or unsupportively regarding the adoption. This in turn created feelings of isolation, bullying or pressure from peers to disclose more information. Bullying of adopted CYP has also been reported in several other studies (Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Crowley, 2019; Gilling, 2014; King, 2009; Wijedasa & Selwyn, 2011). This highlights the importance of raising staff awareness about the prevalence of bullying of adopted CYP. Schools could assign key workers or mentors if deemed appropriate so that CYP are able to share any worries or concerns.

3.3.6. Conclusion

In conclusion, in the present research, the conceptual categories of needing to act proactively and parents teaching professionals contrasted with the categories

of shared responsibility and working as a team. Both were influenced by wider school systems: either the individual changing to fit into the system versus the system adapting to meet the needs of the individual. Inflexible, behaviourist school systems were arguably shaped by larger macrosystems of OFSTED driven focus on raising attainment. Consequently, the research has demonstrated the importance of wider school culture in supporting the transition process. This also has implications for EPs to work in systemic ways to inform school policy and staff understanding. This research has demonstrated that secondary school can offer CYP a "fresh start" and opportunity to develop a new identity. In addition, parents valued the diversity of larger secondary schools, which were more representative of families in the real world. Furthermore, I have also shown the importance of relational factors in supporting the transition to secondary such as professionals who understand trauma and attachment, collaborative working, open communication and shared responsibility. Thus, unlike previous research in this area, the present findings have provided detailed insight into the protective factors that appear to be crucial in supporting the transition to secondary school for adopted CYP.

Appendix 1: Example critical synopsis outlined by Wallace and Wray (2011)

Paper Title: Exploring the views and perceptions of adopted young people concerning their education and social development: an interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Author: Carolyn Crowley   **Year:** 2019

1) Why am I reading this?

It directly answers my central question of exploring the views and perceptions of adopted young people in relation to their education. It argues that a large proportion of adopted CYP have experienced early trauma and neglect that can impact on their social and emotional development and engagement with learning. The study is a small-scale qualitative exploration of the experiences of four adopted young people aged between 10 and 16 years. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with participants and transcripts were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Five themes emerged from the interviews; "identity and self", "relationships", "school", "attachment" and "adoptive status".

2) What are the authors trying to do?

The authors question the implicit societal assumption that, once CYP are adopted and living in a stable family environment, their prior problems and "vulnerability" will cease. They oppose this argument and present research that a large proportion of adopted CYP have experienced early childhood trauma and neglect. The authors suggest that early childhood trauma can have a lifelong impact on adopted CYP's self-esteem, identity development, educational experiences, and the challenges that they may experience when forming and maintaining positive relationships.

3) What is relevant to what I want to find out?

- **Issues relating to cultural identity and sharing information about the adoption:** *"Elizabeth has encountered a number of challenges when trying to connect with her birth culture and maintain her cultural identity. She spoke about a difficult period in Year 7, being the only ethnic minority person in a predominantly white school where unknown peers would ask intrusive questions about her cultural background and her adoption"* (p.8).
- **Relationship difficulties: "***Young people's experiences of relationships varied from a high level of anxiety and finding friendships "stressful", whilst others spoke positively about relationships with peers and had established "stable new attachments" (p.8-9).

- **Transition to secondary school:** *Two young people spoke of the challenges they encountered when transitioning from primary school into year 7 and described the transition as "tricky" (p.9).*

4) How convincing are the authors?

The authors are convincing and reference previous research and psychological theory to support the research findings. However, the authors do not adopt criticality when discussing their interpretations of the findings. Thus, ideas are presented as facts and alternative viewpoints are not acknowledged. The author attributes, positive relationships to CYP being "securely attached" to their adoptive parents. The author proposes that being securely attached led CYP to develop a positive sense of self and self-esteem. On the other hand, Crowley (2018) comments that negative relationships are linked to "underdeveloped social skills" and "insecure attachment profiles". However, the author does not question the directionality of this relationship and the impact labels such as "attachment disorder" have on CYP's self-esteem and their perception of their ability to form relationships with others.

5) What use can I make of this?

The findings suggest that adopted CYP achieve lower attainment compared to many other groups. The paper highlights the difficulties that some adopted CYP may encounter when accessing education. This study also adds to the existing literature, which has found adoption to improve educational outcomes when compared to LAC. The findings also emphasise the importance of adopted CYP developing positive relationships with peers. In addition, this paper draws attention to the stigma and prevalence of bullying experienced by some adopted CYP. However, it will be important to critically analyse the interpretation of findings and their implications and to present alternative formulations.

Appendix 2: Table of Themes and original author terms/interpretation

Themes/Concepts	Cooper (2007)	Hill and Koester (2015)	Gilling (2014)	Goldberg, Black, Sweeney & Moyer (2017)	King (2009)	Crowley (2019)
Teacher's Understanding of Adoption	"Half of parents reported that their child's school did not have a good understanding of his/her needs". Some parents felt that teachers' misunderstanding led to poor judgements, such as blaming all the child's difficulties on the adoption and setting low expectations that become self-fulfilling. Nine per cent of parents reported that their child had been excluded at some point.	Hill and Koester (2015) suggest that adoption created more "positive" IEPs which focused on specific needs and goals and included a "more respectful tone" compared to pre-adoption IEPs.	"It became obvious that he had assessed Jasper as a 'troublemaker from an early stage, as he used words like 'deliberate', 'provocative', 'bully' and 'exclusion'. "Little account had been taken of his traumatic background… We believe they felt he had got over it"	Some parents described positive ways in which schools explicitly acknowledged adoption…in the curriculum and/or classroom". Whilst some parents felt that teachers didn't "understand" adoption and this manifested in insensitive assignments and activities. A few parents confronted teachers' assumptions that adoption involved "the rescuing of children"	"Since you phoned me, I've been thinking more and more about it, thinking…they've got exactly the same issues as looked after children". Some responses highlight the lack of awareness surrounding the impact of in utero and early post-natal damage.	

Themes/ Concepts	Cooper (2007)	Hill and Koester (2015)	Gilling (2014)	Goldberg, Black, Sweeney & Moyer (2017)	King (2009)	Crowley (2019)
Disclosing the child's adoptive status	*Nearly all (90%) parents had shared some information with the school about their child's adoption and most of them (67%) were satisfied with the school's response.*		*At an early stage, when Jasper was struggling to keep on task and was having arguments with some of his peers, we let the class teacher know about his adoption and his early adverse life experiences and how this might have affected his engagement with adults and other children. Although we shared that Jasper was adopted and struggled at times, this was not seen as a trigger for extra help.*	*Goldberg et al. report three types of disclosure (proactive, reactive and implicit).* *Many parents emphasized that they wanted to take a proactive role in disclosing their child's adoptive status. Reasons for this approach included: promoting the use of appropriate language e.g. "birth mom" and supporting teachers to respond sensitively if the child was teased about adoption or in case the child brought it up.*	*Most parents informed the school of their child's adoptive status. In general, parents felt this had been beneficial. However, a minority experienced negative consequences, such as hostility from other parents, teasing from some children and a lack of understanding from teachers.*	*Elizabeth has encountered a number of challenges when trying to connect with her birth culture and maintain her cultural identity. She spoke about a difficult period in Year 7, being the only ethnic minority person in a predominantly white school where unknown peers would ask intrusive questions about her cultural background and her adoption.*

				Nine couples described a strategy of reactive disclosure: they had disclosed their child's adoptive status in reaction to an event that had occurred. *A few couples reported implicit disclosure; they did not explicitly disclose their child's adoptive status because they felt it was "obvious," because of their status as two moms/dads, and/or the fact that their child was of a different race than both parents.* *Many parents engaged in*		

Themes/ Concepts	Cooper (2007)	Hill and Koester (2015)	Gilling (2014)	Goldberg, Black, Sweeney & Moyer (2017)	King (2009)	Crowley (2019)
				proactive disclosure about their family structure, such that they directly addressed the two-mum/dad nature of their family.		
Labelling, identification of need and support	*Around 30 different diagnostic labels were specified in parents' responses and parents referred to CYP's sensory and physical impairments; concentration and limited attention spans.* *Parents' responses indicated that over a third of children (39%) had been identified as*	*Children who received special education services prior to adoption were classified as having an "emotional-behavioural disorder".* *"In most cases (eight children), post-adoption families pursued additional testing for their children and discovered their child's disability had*	*"We inquired of the new class teacher, who also said she has asked the SENCo for an assessment of his needs but we were told to wait".* *"The doctor felt that Jasper was likely to have suffered the ill-effects of substance misuse and might be suffering from ADHD and possible foetal*		*A common anxiety amongst parents was whether their child's behaviour/needs were normal for any child or whether it was a function of their adoption.* *"I find it very hard to know if (child) is finding it awkward to get on with others, is that because (child) is a bit awkward, or is it because*	*Elizabeth has encountered a number of challenges when trying to connect with her birth culture and maintain her cultural identity. She spoke about a difficult period in Year 7, being the only ethnic minority person in a predominantly white school where unknown peers would ask intrusive questions about*

	having SEN, with 23% having SEN statements.	*been misdiagnosed or misidentified in the school setting".* *"He was diagnosed with ADHD and on medicine for that, but he was misdiagnosed. He was diagnosed with high-functioning autism after moving in with us".* *"After my child was diagnosed with foetal alcohol syndrome, her grades improved because she was getting the right help".*	*alcohol syndrome", which would inevitably explain some of his behavioural difficulties".*	*(child) is adopted?"* *"Sometimes it's just a phase they are going through, it's not necessarily because they are adopted".*	*her cultural background and her adoption.*

Themes/ Concepts	Cooper (2007)	Hill and Koester (2015)	Gilling (2014)	Goldberg, Black, Sweeney & Moyer (2017)	King (2009)	Crowley (2019)
Relationships and Bullying	*32% of parents expressed concerns about their child's friendships.* *For children, 'having and being with friends' was given the largest number of responses.* *16% of parents referenced bullying or teasing regarding adoption.*	*Parents cited how adoption had "expanded their children's community and social networks" as children were settled in a "stable, permanent home" e.g. immediate and extended family and more opportunities to build peer relationships through extracurricular activities.*	*"Jasper mentioned that both boys and girls pushed him around at school. We did not report it as we assumed the school could handle it"* *"The situation changed when we received a letter from the head saying that Jasper had been bullying…the head teacher told Jasper that he must write an immediate letter of apology and that if he continued he might be excluded from school".*			*Young people's experiences of relationships varied from a high level of anxiety and finding friendships "stressful", whilst others spoke positively about relationships with peers and had established "stable new attachments".* *Crowley (2018) attributes negative relationships to underdeveloped social skills and insecure attachment profiles which cause "control seeking" and "angry outbursts". In contrast,*

Themes/ Concepts	Cooper (2007)	Hill and Koester (2015)	Gilling (2014)	Goldberg, Black, Sweeney & Moyer (2017)	King (2009)	Crowley (2019)
						positive relationships to "secure attachments to adoptive parents" *Crowley (2018) references one young person who is "receiving report for her attachment issues".*
Transition to secondary school					*Pupils were generally excited about the prospect of secondary school, citing the opportunity to make new friends and experience different types of lessons. However, they were aware of parents concerns.*	*Two young people spoke of the challenges they encountered when transitioning from primary school into year 7 and described the transition as "tricky".*

| | | | | | *Where concerns did exist, pupils related this to: bullying, having different teachers, as well as having to tell people that they were adopted.* | |
| | | | | | *Those already at secondary reported mixed experiences. Just over half stated that they felt stressed at the start, attributing this to size of the new school, difficulties getting to lessons, increase in homework and volume of new material to remember.* | |

<u>Parent Information Sheet</u>

Research Project – Exploring how adopted children and young people are supported on their transition to secondary school.

Dear Parent,

My name is Danielle Barry and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist currently working in schools in the area. I am in my second year of an Applied Doctorate in Educational Psychology course at Newcastle University. I am about to begin my thesis research exploring how adopted children and young people are supported on their transition to secondary school.

I would like to speak with parents, such as yourself, about your views on what supported your child's transition to secondary school and what you felt worked well. All of your information will be kept private and confidential and stored on a password protected computer. Audio recordings will be password protected and will be destroyed after the project has been completed. Transcript data will also be deleted after the research project has been completed. If you disclose any information which suggests that you or others are at risk of significant harm, then the researcher will pass this information on to an appropriate professional.

If you would like to have a discussion and have your views heard, please return the form attached to: a.d.barry2@newcastle.ac.uk and I will be in touch to arrange a date and time to meet. If you have any further questions or concerns, feel free to contact myself or my research supervisor at billy.peters@newcastle.ac.uk.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you,

Danielle Barry

Parent consent Form

Please tick each box if you agree:

- I have read and understood the information sheet. ☐

- I know that the discussion will be recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed. ☐

- I know that confidentiality will be maintained by removing any individual identifying information and participant's data will be reported anonymously. ☐

- I am aware that voice recordings will be encrypted and the computer itself password protected. Hard copies of questionnaires will be kept securely in a locked cabinet which will only be accessible to members of the research team and audio recordings will be destroyed after the project has been completed. ☐

- I know that the interviews are confidential but if I disclose any information which suggests that myself or others are at risk of significant harm, then the researcher will pass this information on to an appropriate adult/professional. ☐

- I am aware that I am free to ask questions at any point. ☐

- I know if I take part in this study, I can choose to withdraw at any stage and my details and views will be erased. ☐

- I would like to take part in this study. ☐

- Please tick this box if you also consent to your child being interviewed. ☐

Name: Date:

Signature:

If you have any further questions or concerns, feel free to contact myself at:
a.d.barry2@newcastle.ac.uk or my research supervisor at
billy.peters@newcastle.ac.uk.

<u>Young person Information Sheet</u>

Research Project – Exploring how adopted children and young people are supported on their transition to secondary school.

Dear Participant,

My name is Danielle Barry and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist currently working in schools in the area. I am in my second year of an Applied Doctorate in Educational Psychology course at Newcastle University. I am about to begin my thesis research exploring how adopted children and young people are supported to settle into secondary school.

I have previously spoken with your parents about your experience of starting at secondary school and they said that you might be interested in talking to me too. I would like to talk to you about your experiences at school and what you feel helped you to settle into secondary school. All of your information will be kept private and confidential and stored on a password protected computer. Audio recordings will be password protected and will be destroyed after the project has been completed. Transcript data will also be deleted after the research project has been completed. If you disclose any information which suggests that you or others are at risk of significant harm, then the researcher will pass this information on to an appropriate adult/professional.

If you would like to have a discussion and have your views heard, please return the form attached to: a.d.barry2@newcastle.ac.uk and I will be in touch to arrange a date and time to meet. If you have any further questions or concerns, feel free to contact myself or my research supervisor at billy.peters@newcastle.ac.uk

I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you,

Danielle Barry

Newcastle University

Young person consent Form

Please tick each box if you agree:

- I have read and understood the information sheet. ☐

- I know that the discussion will be recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed. ☐

- I know that what I tell you will be included anonymously in a research project. ☐

- I am aware that confidentiality will be maintained, and the researcher will remove all of my personal details such as my name/the names of others I mention, my address and the name of my school. ☐

- I am aware that voice recordings will be password protected and the computer itself also password protected, and audio recordings will be destroyed after the project has been completed. ☐

- I know that the interviews are confidential but if I disclose any information which suggests that myself or others are at risk of significant harm, then the researcher will pass this information on to an appropriate adult/professional. ☐

- I am aware that I am free to ask questions at any point. ☐

- I know if I take part in this study, I can choose to withdraw at any stage and my details and views will be erased. ☐

- I would like to take part in this study and my participation is voluntary. ☐

Name: Date:

Signature:

If you have any further questions or concerns, feel free to contact myself at:
a.d.barry2@newcastle.ac.uk or my research supervisor at
billy.peters@newcastle.ac.uk.

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