Improving the educational outcomes for a 'looked after' child in Year 10: a case study

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Title

Improving the educational outcomes for a looked-after child in Year 10: a case study.

Abstract

Michael is a looked-after child at the school where I am the Vice-Principal (Pastoral). He was placed in foster care at the age of 10 as a result of being emotionally abused by his biological mother. Michael presents with very challenging behaviour and was at risk of suspension and/or expulsion – outcomes which would only serve to further compound his difficulties and contribute to poor educational outcomes. As such, the basis of our intervention was to provide staff with training which would enable them to better understand how Michael's insecure attachment and history of maltreatment contributes to the problem behaviour he exhibits. This piece of research suggests that when equipped with this understanding, teachers respond to Michael's behavioural difficulties in a more empathetic and less punitive manner, helping to ensure his continued enrolment at the school. Other findings include: the valuable role that an educational psychologist played in delivering this school-based training; the intervention being strengthened by the role Michael played in its design; the need for greater collaboration between the school and Michael's social worker; and concluded that although important, attachment theory should not be the sole framework used to help ameliorate the behaviour of looked-after children.

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1. Introduction

> The evidence tells us that many looked-after children massively underachieve in education. Of the children recorded as in care, who left school in 2011/12, only 19% achieved 5 GCSEs at Grades A*-C including English and Mathematics compared with 62% of general school leavers. That is unacceptable. I want looked-after children to achieve their best and I acknowledge that they might need extra support to help them do that. (John O'Dowd, Minister of Education in N. Ireland, 29th April 2014)

In the same speech, the Minister announced the development of a new policy for the education of looked-after children (LAC) to help them achieve their full potential. Improving the educational outcomes for LAC, which is the focus for my small-scale research, is therefore a real and contemporary concern. It also has professional relevance for me; as Vice Principal at Beechgrove College (pseudonym), I have responsibility for this cohort of young people. It is significant that during my tenure as Vice Principal, the number of LAC attending the school has increased from just one in 2012, to a current figure of six. And yet in respect of LAC, my professional knowledge and understanding remains very limited – these young people weren't mentioned during my period of initial teacher education, nor have they been the focus of any subsequent in-service training. So whilst witnessing the acute issues that some LAC at Beechgrove College are experiencing, I felt like a bystander, powerless to intervene. A growing sense of frustration and lack of self-efficacy has driven me to find out more.

This sense of purpose was reinforced when I read an article by Fletcher-Campbell (1998). She challenged my approach, by emphasising that the normal channels of pastoral support in schools are inadequate to support LAC. Because these children are looked-after, the structure of their lives is not 'normal' and so a special understanding is needed of the difficulties that they face. In terms of fulfilling my responsibility to LAC, I may have over-relied on average educational inputs for children presenting with above-

average educational needs. Jackson (1987) also points out that LAC are often an overlooked group within the education system because they are seen to be the concern of social workers rather than teachers (a mind-set that I was perhaps guilty of myself). She argues that schools must take more responsibility for the underachievement of LAC. Indeed the main aim of this research is to investigate how Beechgrove College can help improve educational outcomes for a looked-after child called Michael (pseudonym), and others similar to him in the future. To help achieve this, training was provided to teachers at the school to increase their awareness of the needs of LAC, particularly in relation to Michael's challenging behaviour. In order to evaluate the success of this intervention, the research will attempt to answer the following questions:

- How can the continuing professional development of teachers help to address Michael's behavioural issues?
- Does a teacher's knowledge of attachment theory help them to better understand Michael's needs?
- Has the intervention benefited from Michael's involvement in its design?

2. Literature Review

2.1 What does 'looked-after' mean?

In Northern Ireland, the term 'looked-after' refers to a child who is in the care of a Trust[1] or who is provided with accommodation by a Trust (by reason of a court order or through agreement with their parents) as covered by the use of the term in the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. LAC may be living in residential homes or schools, with foster carers, or with a family relative or friend.

Children are taken into care only as a last resort when the family situation is considered to be so bad that to leave them with their own parents would entail a greater risk than the act of removing them and (usually) placing them with strangers. Only severe, substantiated maltreatment is likely to result in a child's removal from home and every attempt is made to keep families together wherever possible. Implicit in this process is the belief that separation of children from their parents is likely to be detrimental to their emotional and psychological well-being. Whether children are subject to a care order or are accommodated, the State strives to work in partnership with parents – this is a principle of the Children Act (1989). Indeed this Act introduced the term 'looked-after' to emphasise that accommodation by a local authority should be offered as a service to a family in difficulty rather than being a punishment for failure.

[1] There are six Trusts in Northern Ireland which provide health and social care services to the public on a regional basis.

2.2 Exploring the characteristics of the looked-after population

The number of LAC is increasing – in March 2013 there were 68,110 LAC in England[2] which represents a 12% increase compared to March 2009. In September 2013, there were 2,071 LAC in N. Ireland[3], and significantly, this figure has increased by 25% since September 2009. In N. Ireland these figures represent a rate of 48 children per 10,000 of the population aged under 18, somewhat higher that the equivalent figure for England, which is 41 children per 10,000. In terms of their profile, LAC are far from being a homogeneous group - they enter care at different points in their childhood, for different reasons, and leave at different intervals.

Children enter care as a result of a complex interplay of vulnerabilities arising from their needs and their parents' ability to meet these needs. The majority become looked-after due to abuse and neglect (61%), family dysfunction (11%), acute stress within the family (9%), the disability of the parent or child (8%) or the absence of a parent to provide care (9%) (Coman & Devaney, 2011). Therefore as Martin & Jackson (2002) point out, most LAC come into care through no fault of their own.

In a much-quoted paper, Bebbington & Miles (1989) showed that LAC are drawn overwhelmingly from the most disadvantaged families. They are much more likely to have a single parent trying to manage on a low income, to come from a minority ethnic background, to live in substandard accommodation and have many siblings. It is also important to recognise that apart from those with congenital abnormalities or brain-damage as a result of abuse, the great majority have intelligence within the normal range.

[2] All figures for England, unless otherwise referenced, are taken from the Department for Education (2013) publication.
[3] All figures for N. Ireland, unless otherwise referenced, are taken from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2014) publication.

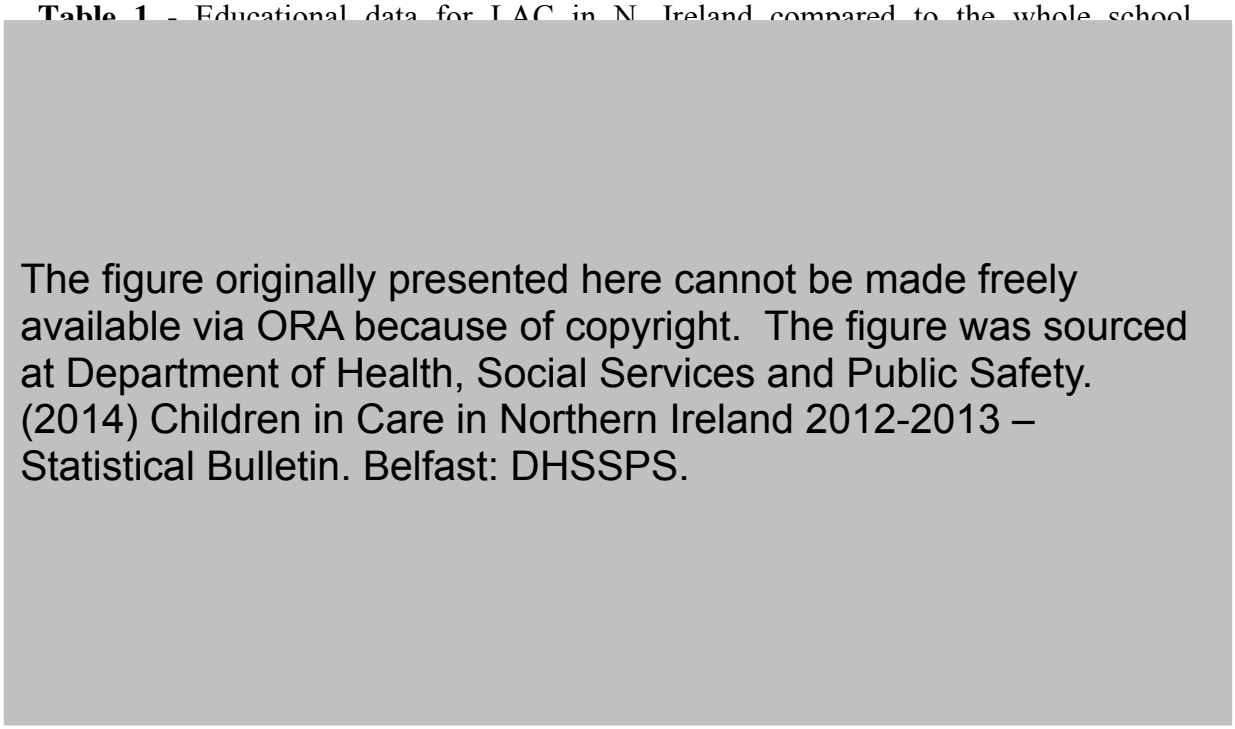
The length of time children spend in care varies. Contrary to popular belief, most LAC eventually go home with the majority experiencing a swift reunion. Half return home within a year, a quarter leave within eight weeks, and one fifth are back in the first week after separation (Jackson, 2001). However re-entry to the care system is common - about two-thirds of LAC return (Jackson, 2013). LAC who remain in care for more than six months are likely to stay for long periods, and may spend the rest of their childhood in care.

In N. Ireland, the highest proportion of LAC in 2012/13 were in the 5-11 (35%) and 12-15 (27%) age groups. Although as a proportion of the population, a far greater number of older children are looked-after than younger ones, Jackson (2000) makes us aware that the average age of the care population has been falling. There is a heavy concentration in the literature on the older age group of LAC, probably because they are seen as more problematic. As of September 2013, 52% of LAC in N. Ireland were male and 48% were female. The majority of LAC are in foster care – the 2013 figure for N. Ireland is 77% and for England is 75%.

2.3 The education of looked-after children

The concern about the education of LAC has a short history. In her seminal work, The Education of Children in Care, Jackson (1987) drew attention to the fact that at that time there was 'not one single book published in Great Britain or the United States concerned with the education and welfare of children in public care' (p. 5). Since then there appears to be universal agreement amongst researchers that LAC do less well educationally than the rest of the population (Berridge, 2012; Flynn et al. 2012; Forsman & Vinnerljung, 2012; Pecora, 2014). This is certainly the case in N. Ireland, as shown below.

Table 1 - Educational data for LAC in N. Ireland compared to the whole school



This data also reinforces a consistent trend highlighted by O'Sullivan & Westerman (2007) - the attainment gap between LAC and the rest of the school population widens with age.

Patterns of underachievement for LAC are also evident in England – in 2013 there was a difference of 42.7% between the rates of LAC and non-LAC achieving A*-C GCSEs in English and Mathematics (and worryingly, this gap had increased since 2009). For

Canada, Flynn et al. (2013) reported that 42% of LAC graduated from secondary school in 2010 compared to 79% of the general youth population. Meanwhile, a comprehensive review (29 studies in total) of American educational research by Trout el al. (2008) found that when compared with their peers in the general population, LAC had higher levels of grade retention, suspension, school dropout, and involvement in special education. Collectively this data presents a dauntingly gloomy and consistent set of findings. The fact that LAC do considerably less well educationally than their peers in different countries, where there are different legislative and service structures, leads Hayden (2005) to conclude that the difficulties in improving educational outcomes for LAC should not be underestimated.

The significance of this educational disadvantage is that it leads in turn to disadvantage in other areas. The report published by the Social Exclusion Unit (2003) highlighted that in later life LAC are more likely to be socially excluded than children from almost any other background. This report showed that LAC are disproportionately more likely to become teenage parents, be unemployed, end up in prison, become homeless or have serious physical and mental health problems.

2.4 Looked-after children – from obscurity to top of the policy agenda

Following on from Jackson's 1987 publication, the education of LAC not only acquired increasing importance among academic researchers, but also policy makers. The belief that placing children in care would automatically result in good outcomes came under scrutiny. As a result, the underachievement of LAC has now become a standard, and usually significant, item of discussion in official publications of government departments with responsibility for LAC – some of which we will now refer to.

As well as declaring their intention to raise educational standards for all children, the Labour Government which came to power in 1997 extended this aspiration specifically to LAC in the form of the Quality Protects initiative (Department of Health, 1998). It is not hard to decipher a wider, political rationale for this given the focus of New Labour on tackling social exclusion. Few social groups exhibit as many of the indicators of exclusion (homelessness, joblessness, poor qualifications etc.) as those young people who have been through the care system. The government took the view that education was a good thing in itself, and that good educational outcomes could be used as a proxy measure with respect to care i.e. if a young person was doing well at school then they were likely to be receiving a good quality of care. Indeed, in launching Quality Protects, Frank Dobson, then Secretary of State for Social Services, described educational achievement as 'the single most significant measure of effectiveness of local authority parenting' (Jackson, 2001, p. 3).

Education rose to the top of the agenda for LAC with the government Green Paper, Care Matters: Transforming the lives of children and young people in care (Department for

Education and Skills, 2006)[4]. Seen as a visionary paper, it set out a variety of proposals aimed at strengthening the corporate parenting role of local authorities, and significantly, gave unprecedented space and emphasis to education. Indeed, writing in 2012, Welbourne & Leeson commented that 'there is better policy support for the education of children in care now than at any previous time' (p. 129). For example, each looked-after child had a personal education plan (PEP) which ensures that the relevant agencies and individuals are actively prioritising their education. The role of Designated Teacher was created to advocate for the interests and attainment of LAC. A number of successful pilots led to the role of Virtual School Head being made statutory in England, while the introduction of Pupil Premium Plus in 2014 provides schools with an extra £1900 for each looked-after child to help raise their attainment.

[4] This paper was mirrored in N. Ireland by the 2007 publication of 'Care Matters in Northern Ireland – A Bridge to a Better Future'.

2.5 The risk factors that impede the progress of looked-after children at school

The poor educational outcomes for LAC stem from a constellation of factors, some of which include: pre-care experience of maltreatment; placement instability (which often leads to disrupted schooling); inadequate support for school progress in the care environment; poor inter-professional collaboration; low expectations by teachers and social workers; lack of priority accorded to education in care planning. It will not be possible in this piece of research to elaborate more fully on each of these issues. Instead we will focus on one of the most common risk factors identified by the literature, and one that is very pertinent to the study. This is the high incidence of behavioural problems among LAC compared to the general population (Dubowitz et al., 1994; Tarren-Sweeney, 2008; Zetlin et al., 2004; Vacca, 2008). The fact that these problems have been observed in school settings has particular relevance for my study.

Research by Fantuzzo & Perlman (2007), which involved over 11,000 second grade students in the US, reported significantly higher levels of behaviour problems for LAC than children with no out-of-home placement history. In the UK, Colton & Heath (1994) found that 31% of their study participants (who were in foster care) were manifesting behavioural disorder, compared to a figure of 6.8% for the population as a whole. According to the Department for Education and Skills (2004), the principal challenge in dealing with LAC was managing their difficult behaviour. This is reinforced by Honey et al. (2011) who reported that the most prevalent risk factor identified by Designated Teachers for the LAC in their sample was: '*Difficult behaviour at school*'. According to Stein (1997), externalising behavioural problems were particularly prevalent amongst children in foster care (e.g. conduct disorder, oppositional and attentional problems), and noted the significant disturbance that these can cause in the classroom. The problem is

that these maladaptive school-related behaviours put LAC at greater risk of suspension and/or expulsion. For example, research by Trout et al. (2008) found that LAC were three times more likely to be suspended or expelled due to problem behaviours than youth not in care. Scherr's (2007) meta-analyses of 31 US studies revealed that 24% of foster youth had been suspended or expelled at some point during their education compared to a figure of 7% for all students in the US. Figures for England show that in 2011/12, 11.36% of LAC had a fixed term exclusion from school compared to a figure of 4.05% for all children. Alarmingly, in N. Ireland, LAC were almost five times more likely to be suspended from school. This data is especially poignant given the negative effects of suspension and expulsion on academic achievement reported by Scherr (2007). It is not surprising that Flynn et al. (2013) identify the level of behavioural difficulties as one of the most consistent predictors of educational success for LAC.

Digging a little deeper into the data on disciplinary actions reveals other trends worthy of mention. Zima et al. (2000) found boys in foster care had almost seven times the odds of being suspended or expelled from school compared to girls. Age was also related to behaviour problems - Bernedo et al. (2012) found that foster children had more behavioural issues during mid-adolescence (12–15 years) than during early or late adolescence.

2.6 Why do looked-after children have more behavioural problems?

Most LAC have survived multiple negative or traumatic experiences including: poverty; physical, sexual and emotional maltreatment; separation from caregivers; inconsistent and harsh parenting; and parental psychopathology. These accumulated experiences mean that LAC are a high risk group for mental health problems – nationally representative British surveys report a mental disorder prevalence of 45% among LAC, which is much higher than the figure of 9.4% for the general population (Goodman & Goodman, 2012). Pecora (2013) reported levels of PTSD among children entering their foster care programme in Seattle as similar to that in veterans returning from service in Afghanistan.

Therefore the same emotional and intellectual attributes that children need to cope with the demands of being in school may have been impaired by their pre-care experiences e.g. reduced ability to tolerate stress and regulate emotion. As many LAC retain vivid memories of their past trauma, their heightened sensitivity mean they can suffer chronic activation of fear responses, causing over-reaction to triggers that others find non-threatening. Children's adaptive responses for short-term physical and emotional survival can become an impediment to engagement with learning in supportive environments when defensive adaptations to adversity underlie ingrained patterns of behaviour. As Welbourne & Leeson (2012) note:

> Children who have survived severely injured childhoods tenaciously hold on to the behaviours and attitudes that served them well in a former time, even when they are counterproductive in their current situation. (p. 135)

Research by Eckenrode et al. (1993) is also enlightening. Their results showed significant differences in academic effects across types of maltreatment, suggesting that child maltreatment is not a uni-dimensional construct. In addition to concluding that

abuse predicts increased behaviour problems, Bernedo et al. (2012) found that such problems were particularly persistent in children who had been physical and emotionally abused. Therefore it may be inappropriate to generalise findings beyond children experiencing the particular form or forms of maltreatment being investigated. Given their histories of exposure to severe psychosocial stressors it is unsurprising that LAC can have significant behavioural issues.

At this juncture, it is useful to draw attention to research carried out by the Child Welfare Information Gateway (2009) which explored the effects of maltreatment on brain development. Persistent fear and hyperarousal may lead to over-production of cortisol, reaching levels of toxicity which can have lasting effects on brain development. In other words, under the impact of traumatic stress we are poisoned by our own physiological survival response. The damage can be particularly pervasive for the developing child, producing alterations in cognitive, behavioural and social functioning.

However attributing poor behaviour solely to the pre-care experience would be remiss. A study by Newton et al. (2000) reported that volatile placement histories contribute negatively to both internalising and externalising behaviour of LAC, and that children who experience numerous changes in placement are at a particularly high risk for these deleterious effects. Once removed from one dangerous or neglectful environment, a child confronting further disruption and rejection through numerous placement failures is likely to experience behavioural difficulties. Jackson (2000) refers to a survey of four thousand LAC carried out by the Who Cares? Trust which found that 28% had moved more than six times and 9% more than ten times. This volatility exacerbates behavioural issues

given the emotional rollercoaster of raised expectations and potential serial losses experienced by the child until a settled placement is reached.

There is of course a complex causal relationship between placement instability and behaviour – either may precipitate the other. They also share another significant feature in that both can result in a change of school (or at the very least, time out of school), which is an additional risk factor in terms of attainment. This outcome is perhaps more obvious in terms of exclusion, but Fernandez (2008) also found that 78% of LAC had to change schools when they moved foster placement. Many children find school transfer stressful, including expected, age-related transitions. Given their disrupted attachment histories, LAC can face particular adaptation problems when starting a new school (and due to their mobility, LAC may experience the 'new school syndrome' repeatedly). According to Sullivan et al. (2010) this instability can also lead to 'LAC being viewed as transients by school personnel where it makes little sense to invest time and resources to assess the child's needs and provide specialised services' (p. 165). One notable trend to emerge from Jackson's (1998) research was that few of the LAC who had attained the 5 GCSE A*-C threshold had been out of school for any length of time. She concluded that keeping LAC in school, and where possible the same school, has to be a top priority (particularly in the lead up to public examinations). And just to emphasise the vicious cycle faced by LAC, Stone et al. (2006) also found school change to be significantly correlated with an increase in behavioural problems.

This section on 'behaviour' and 'placement instability' encapsulates one of the key arguments which emerges from the literature – are the poor educational outcomes for LAC due to the pre-care environment or the care experience? During the early

development of the research agenda, Jackson (1987) pointed out that we should resist the impression of a necessary correlation between being in care and poor educational outcomes, even for those children experiencing major personal or emotional difficulties. She firmly believes that the care system all too often seems to reinforce early disadvantage rather than helping children to overcome it. Jackson is not alone in this opinion – in reviewing the research on LAC outcomes, Evans (2003) concluded that:

> It is hard for governments to escape the charge that, in replacing 'feckless parents', they have been shown to be 'feckless' themselves – that, far from enhancing the lives of those cared for, they have simply added another layer of disadvantage. (p. 82)

Berridge (2007) and other authors like Essen et al. (1976) come to a very different conclusion by pointing out that the risk factors associated with family breakdown and entry into care are themselves closely linked to educational failure. It is therefore disingenuous to attribute the poor academic results of LAC mainly to the inadequacies of the care system – those who do have confused correlation with causation. Moreover, the official statistics suggest that children who are looked-after longer tend to do better educationally than those who stay in care more briefly. Data from the Department for Education (2010) shows that examination passes at 16 years for children who have been in care for over five years are double those of children separated for a shorter period of between 1 year-18 months. But if the care system were an additional educational risk factor we might expect the reverse.

Taking sides in this debate is not the objective. However it did help to elucidate some key themes which were relevant in moving forward with the research. For example, when designing interventions to help LAC, one has to be mindful of the pervasive effect that maltreatment has on achievement and behaviour. In addition, although the factors

which cluster to predict entry into care are also associated with educational failure, the system itself cannot be absolved from blame. In recognition of schools being an important part of the system, it is imperative that actions take place in these institutions to help support LAC with their education.

2.7 What can schools do to address the behaviour of looked-after children?

'Understanding why "problem" behaviours may have developed is key to finding effective interventions' (Luke et al., 2014, p. 7). And yet the average teacher does not possess the knowledge and skills to fully understand the difficulties LAC face, as for many, their period of initial teacher education did not include learning about the care system. This helps to explain the significant body of research which points to teacher training as an important intervention. For example, Slade & Wissow (2007) believe that, 'greater awareness of maltreatment could lead teachers to respond more effectively to students who are behaviourally difficult' (p. 612). According to Cameron & Maginn (2009), 'helping teachers to see more clearly what underpins the behaviour of children in care is a particularly important task for supporting professionals' (p. 84). Training can therefore enable teachers to look beyond the overt behaviour, to consider the underlying message which the child is conveying through such behaviour and to respond with a more empathetic management approach.

And yet, as reported by Bernedo et al. (2012), it appears that teachers receive very little training in addressing the needs of LAC. The Department for Education and Skills (2004) also found that any such training tended to be aimed at Designated Teachers, and focused on the identification of maltreatment rather than how this can impact on children's education. Research by Ferguson & Wolkow (2012) revealed concern amongst LAC that teachers didn't understand their circumstances and had little insight into the challenges associated with being in care. As part of the 'In Care, In School' project, Parker & Gorman (2013) raised concerns about the lack of training available to help teachers understand the challenges faced by LAC. For them, the gulf in

understanding between social care and schools continues to present a major problem. But what should the training focus on?

Sharing the deeper knowledge of the negative effects of rejection, abuse and neglect is a good starting point. While they may not need to know the details of a child's history of abuse, teachers do need more knowledge of how dysfunctional early relationships hinder scholastic achievement and social adjustment. In particular, Cameron & Maginn (2009) emphasise the need for teachers to understand the process of attachment and how insecure attachment can contribute to the problem behaviour exhibited by LAC. Schofield & Beek (2006) concur, pointing out that 'education is a key area where attachment-related issues interact with other factors to affect progress' (p. 319).

Attachment theory is based on the work of John Bowlby. He highlighted the importance of family experiences as the basic cause of emotional disturbance i.e. the quality of upbringing is very significant in determining future behaviour. A central tenet of his work was the belief that attachment security promotes psychological well-being. So to grow up mentally healthy, Bowlby (1951) believed that 'the infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate and continuous relationship with his mother in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment' (p. 53). Emotions and emotional regulation are established in the attachment relationship as the attunement of the mother to her child in stressful situations establishes self-regulation for infants, a biological necessity since babies do not inherently possess self-regulatory systems. Stevenson-Hinde (2007) refers to the term 'sensitive responsiveness' (first coined by Mary Ainsworth), which has been used to describe the caregiver's ability to read emotional signals accurately and respond appropriately.

Some of the most convincing evidence concerning links between attachment experience and behaviour is described by Sroufe (1983). As part of this research, teachers found more securely attached infants to be more cooperative, while children with a history of anxious attachment showed more negative behavioural signs. The results clearly indicated the importance of quality of attachment as a predictor of behaviour. Fitton (2012) refers to clinical studies of maltreated children which demonstrated conclusively that early adverse experiences, such as child abuse and neglect and other attachment-disrupting traumas, had lifelong effects on subsequent responses to stressors. These pieces of research, like Bowlby, emphasise the lasting impact of early relationships and experiences, and how the mental representations of early life mediate later development.

Luke et al. (2014) have highlighted how attachment theory provides a theoretical framework for understanding the needs of LAC, and as such is the basis of many of the interventions used with this group of young people. More recent research on attachment theory has highlighted the importance of non-maternal caregivers in children's lives (Cassidy, 2000; Slomski-Long, 2009). Therefore, it is not only the mother's role, but also the role of every other primary figure that plays a part in the life of the child's development (which includes teachers), to aid in the attunement and development processes – indeed an article by Geddes (2006) identifies the teacher as a 'specific attachment person' (p. 49). Therefore schools can act as a complementary secure base, as they provide many opportunities for LAC to form constructive relationships with supportive adults. In order to recover from trauma, Cairns (2013) emphasises the importance of children being in a safe place with people they trust and to who they are

securely attached. However crucial to the therapeutic role that schools can play in building attachment security are the attitudes, beliefs and aspirations of teachers.

Teachers may judge the problems of LAC to be so pervasive that they feel unable to provide much in the way of positive corrective action – this is understandable given the disruptive, sometimes aggressive and occasionally violent behaviour of LAC. In Stein's (1997) study, teachers were of the opinion that over half of the foster care group were in need of professional help e.g. some form of talk or play therapy. Training can therefore empower teachers to take on a more active and interventionist role, by helping them to recognise that LAC's behavioural and emotional difficulties are not 'fixed' characteristics. Training also has the potential to alter the perceptions of teachers, and encourage them to abandon the deficit model of LAC as challenging learners. It may allow them to embark upon a significant reassessment of the ingrained attitudes which they may hold regarding the behaviour of LAC - otherwise, school may be a place where LAC suffer further rejection and discrimination.

Scherr (2007) points out that a high proportion of LAC are punished severely in the academic environment. While recognising that these youth may legitimately have more behavioural difficulties than their peers, she believes it is equally likely that they are being unfairly targeted by unprepared school systems. LAC are often singled out by teachers who display a lack of understanding of what is happening in their life, and the consequent impact this has on their behaviour. Jackson (2013) argues that for mainstream schools to work for LAC, it is the education system that has to change, rather than the emphasis being on the 'looked-after' child. As such, she urges the Government

to greatly increase the amount of teacher training on offer with regard to LAC pupils, and that this should apply to all teachers, not just specialists.

Research by Honey et al. (2011) has highlighted promising avenues for educational psychologists to work with schools in delivering such training. Educational psychologists are well placed to explain how the pre-care and in-care experience potentially impact on LAC behaviour and learning. In addition, educational psychologists can help equip teachers with the skills to prevent and manage difficult behaviour, thereby exerting a positive influence on teacher-pupil relationships. According to Altshuler (2003), LAC need a social milieu where both schools and social services recognise the effects of childhood trauma, and then collaborate in the design of appropriate interventions to prevent further deterioration in behaviour. LAC can present with behavioural issues that perplex and frustrate teachers, and at these times, it is important to remember that schools do not function in isolation, but rather as part of a larger system entrusted with the care of children.

It is clear from the evidence presented, that for LAC to stand any chance of succeeding in the mainstream environment, the nurture and support of caring teaching staff is essential. Training can play an important role in helping staff to understand the needs of LAC and look behind the presenting, sometimes difficult, behaviour. This intervention increases the chances of a long-term, stable, successful school experience.

3. The case study individual

Prior to the methodology, I would like to provide a brief biopic of Michael (pseudonym), who is the focus of this research. Michael is 14 years old, and is currently in Year 10 (the equivalent of Year 9 in England) at the school where I teach. Michael has been looked-after by the local Trust for just over four years following a history of emotional abuse by his biological mother. He has two younger sisters who continue to reside with their mother. Although Michael has supervised contact with his family on a fortnightly basis, the Care Plan (agreed by his mother) does not anticipate reunification in the short to medium term. Michael has never had contact with his biological father. Following a short-term foster placement, Michael has remained with the same foster family for all but three months of his time in care. His foster parents have two children of their own, and although they are now grown-up and have left the house, they do visit regularly. Prior to Michael, the foster family provided care for two other foster children – according to the Chair of one of the LAC Reviews I attended, 'they are highly experienced foster parents who provide an excellent standard of care for Michael'.

Michael transferred to us from another local post-primary school in September 2013. He always wanted to attend Beechgrove College, which is a selective grammar school, but was prevented from doing so by his mother. She didn't allow him to sit the Common Entrance Exam[5], in the belief that Michael wouldn't be able to cope with the academic demands of a grammar school education. This instance is perhaps symptomatic of the very fractious relationship which existed between Michael and his mother. It is also worth pointing out that Michael is an able pupil, and he performed to a very pleasing standard in the literacy and numeracy tests which preceded his entry to Beechgrove

[5] This is one of the selection tests commonly used by grammar schools in Northern Ireland.

College. I have already presented evidence of how a change in school is an additional risk factor for LAC - however this is mitigated by the fact that Michael chose to change school. In addition, 'we must not lose sight of the fact that some school moves can be advantageous to the child, especially if they move to a better achieving school' (O'Sullivan & Westerman, 2007, p. 18).

Michael presents with very challenging behavioural issues, which may well be linked to his maltreatment in the pre-care environment. This also helps to explain the focus on behaviour in the literature review. Following admission to Beechgrove College, it only took a couple of weeks for such behaviour to surface. In this instance (which I observed), Michael displayed a level of anger and aggressiveness which meant that he had to be physically restrained by a member of staff. Such instances are very rare in Beechgrove College and so there was a clear sense of shock amongst those staff and pupils who witnessed the incident. According to our system of discipline, Michael's behaviour in this instance clearly merited a period of suspension. However the school decided against this course of action, as we were mindful of Michael's background as a looked-after child. But the poor behaviour continued – serious breaches of discipline were interspersed with frequent instances of low level disruption e.g. incessant chatting, name-calling, and defiance.

As Vice Principal, I was becoming more and more aware that in terms of issuing sanctions, we were treating Michael differently vis-à-vis the rest of the student body. I was also increasingly frustrated at my inability to positively influence Michael's behaviour – this was one of the most significant professional challenges that I had ever faced, and I was failing! We have a number of other LAC at the school, but none

presented with the same externalising behaviour. Michael's continued enrolment was clearly under serious threat and yet I felt almost powerless to intervene. His situation was just like what Poyser (2013) articulates – 'often a looked-after child's future in a school continually hangs by a thread' (p. 133). It is clear now, that as a school, we did not possess the knowledge and skills to fully understand Michael's difficulties - a situation I was determined to change.

Having read through the literature, Michael's increased risk of suspension/exclusion is unsurprising, given that he presents with many of characteristics that predict such an outcome. For example, when referring to foster care youth, Zima et al. (2000) make the following observation:

> The greater odds of school suspension or expulsion for boys, with increasing age, those in placement longer, and those with clinical behaviour problems potentially reflect the beginning of an unfortunate developmental trajectory. (p. 100)

It should be noted that Michael's behavioural issues were not shared with us, either by the social worker, or the school from which he transferred. A number of behavioural incidents involving Michael precipitated my request for the social worker to provide more information, and during a face-to-face meeting, she was more forthcoming. For example, I was informed that Michael was attending a weekly session of psychotherapy in order to assist him in coming to terms with his past abuse. The social worker provided details of Michael's maltreatment, and the very difficult relationship that existed between him and his mother (which is still evident during contact). However the lack of openness from the start was worrying and is perhaps indicative of the situation outlined by Altshuler (2003), where 'educators have felt that caseworkers withhold vital information, whereas caseworkers have felt that educators expect them to divulge confidential, nonessential

information' (p. 55). For me, information on Michael's behavioural record in previous schools was essential, and if it did raise issues to do with confidentiality, I am a professional who knows how to proceed sensitively. Francis (2000) usefully points out that 'social workers and teachers must begin to break down professional barriers and establish the trust needed to facilitate communication and information exchange' (p. 32). I was mindful of the fact that an adversarial, non-collaborative relationship with social services would not assist with remedying the difficulties we were experiencing with Michael.

It is noteworthy that Michael struggles to establish meaningful friendships with other pupils – which may well be due to his unpredictable and sometimes threatening behaviour. However, it is not that Michael is isolated in school. He easily associates with other pupils, but what might appear on the surface as popularity disguises the volatility of such interactions. I have dealt with a number of incidents where Michael has been socialising normally with a pupil (or group of pupils), and yet within a short period of time, the situation has escalated to one of conflict. Michael is highly sensitive to any form of name-calling, and unfortunately, his short temper and lack of emotional regulation is preyed upon by a small minority of pupils.

Michael's difficulties in establishing friendships should not surprise us. Bolger et al. (1998) explain how insecure relationships with parents contribute to a lack of success in peer relationships. This is because children who have been abused (like Michael) may develop models of relationships characterised by distrust, leading to aggressive or defensive behaviour. Abused children are also likely to experience conflict between a natural desire for closeness with others versus the fear, suspicion, and behavioural

inhibition with which they have learned to protect themselves in close relationships. Thus, in addition to providing inappropriate care for their children, maltreating parents may fail to facilitate their child's entry into the peer world as they don't provide an example of proper behaviour. It is noteworthy how this analysis further reinforces the importance of secure attachment.

4. Methodology

4.1 Methodological approach

The basis of our intervention was to provide continuing professional development to teachers which would allow them to better understand and manage the behavioural issues that LAC like Michael present with. It was hoped that this would reduce the chances of Michael being suspended and/or expelled – identified in the literature review as a significant risk factor which can impede educational progress. To design and deliver the training, I was able to access the expertise and guidance of the Behaviour Support Team (BST). The BST is a service which the Education Authority in N. Ireland has in place to support schools dealing with pupils with challenging behaviour. I met with their representative (Steve) on two occasions to agree on the content of the training and the logistics that would be involved. The half-day training took place on a designated Staff Development Day[6] (when no pupils were in school). Steve led the training, which in terms of a theoretical framework, was based on attachment theory and how this applied to LAC. Mary – an educational psychologist who works with the BST - provided further analysis of attachment difficulties and also presented information regarding the effects of maltreatment on a child's brain, and their subsequent development. In addition to the presentations, staff were given the opportunity to work in groups in order to share their professional experiences and discuss the information that was being delivered. Relevant information was provided to staff in the form of booklets, which meant they could refer back to the content of the training in the future. In total, 56 teachers attended the training session, at the end of which they each completed a short evaluation (shown in Appendix

[6] The Department of Education (N. Ireland) allows schools to take up to five Staff Development Days per year.

E). I will now go on to justify my general methodological approach and describe the specific research methods and tools that I used to design and evaluate the intervention.

Goddard (2000) points to the lack of research which portrays the daily experience of LAC in school, and the few attempts to seek the views of teachers. These are two aspects that I have incorporated in order to strengthen the research. Although the day-to-day experience of LAC in schools does exhibit certain significant patterns it is, in other respects, as varied as those outside the care system. Therefore policy responses need to be flexible enough to take account of the individual and their preferences – such fine-tuning is something that Zima et al. (2000) feel is particularly important when conducting research with LAC. This reaffirms the efforts we are making to specifically tailor the intervention to Michael and his needs. It also helps to justify the single-case design being adopted i.e. focusing on just one pupil who is looked-after.

According to Yin (2009) a case study 'investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context' (p. 18). In this research, the case is an individual person i.e. Michael. In other studies the case may be a group, such as a family, an institution, such as a school, or even a whole country's education system. The case study approach is attractive as it describes real people in real life situations, enabling us to build up a picture of the unfolding interaction of events, human relationships and other factors. Therefore case studies can 'enable readers to better understand how ideas and abstract theories fit together' (Yin, 2009, p. 72). In respect of Michael, and also his teachers, I wanted to catch the close-up reality of participants' lived experiences, thoughts and feelings – what Geertz (1973) refers to as the 'thick description'. These unique features, which may be lost in larger-scale data sets, are essential to an understanding of context

and situation, and can help fuse theory with practice. The fine grain nature of the case study may also allow us to penetrate situations in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis.

'It is often heard that case studies, being idiographic, have limited generalizability' (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 294). I fully recognise that the small sample size of this study makes it difficult to generalise the findings, particularly as the population of LAC is highly heterogeneous. As such, the research which is presented here should not be seen as a simple formula that can be replicated in order to achieve the same outcomes - I am not trying to produce a guide for teachers when it comes to dealing with LAC who present with behavioural issues. Instead I will leave it to the readers to make inferences as to whether this case study provides a useful insight into similar situations and cases e.g. for LAC who share Michael's background and difficulties. Rather than drawing nomothetic conclusions, this research can perhaps contribute to a growing pool of data, with multiple case studies contributing to greater generalisability. In addition, although the case study approach may mitigate our ability to generalise, it does not prevent us from being able to extrapolate to relevant theory - remembering that our behaviour intervention is based on attachment. Indeed Woodier (2011) would argue that it is probably more important to understand how such theoretical frameworks can be used to reflect on and guide practice. In any case, this research will not be seeking to provide the definitive word on how schools can address the behavioural issues associated with some LAC. Rather, I will put forward provisional/tentative conclusions in light of available evidence, which are open to yet further correction and refinement.

Zima et al. (2000) point to the growing recognition that children and young people have the right to be consulted, with their voices being listened to and acted upon. There is a strong argument for more participatory approaches to research which provide opportunities for the views of the intended beneficiaries of policy and practice, particularly those at the margins of society, to be heard and taken account of. As such, I felt that it was important to listen to Michael so that his perspective could be used to help design the intervention. Indeed I took some time to explain this to Michael, which I believe encouraged him to be more open and honest during the research. LAC should increasingly be seen as competent social actors capable of offering their views on their own experiences within a social world. And yet Luke et al. (2014) comment upon the paucity of research that incorporates the views of LAC. This was also a point raised by Blyth and Milner (1998) – they highlighted that 'relatively few studies have sought to ask care recipients directly about their educational experiences' (p. 48).

At the outset of this dissertation, I believed that I was embarking on a piece of action research. The definition provided by Cohen et al. (2011, p. 345) - 'a small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and the close examination of the effects of such an intervention' - only served to reaffirm this. However these authors also mention the perspective put forward by Kurt Lewin, who would strongly contend that an approach is only action research when all active participants are fully involved in research decisions as co-researchers. A key principle is therefore to research 'with' rather than 'on' people. Our efforts to involve Michael (outlined in the previous paragraph) are designed to make the research a more collaborative and shared enterprise, but I still realise that there may not be a full equalisation of power – some separation between myself and Michael still remains. Therefore it may be more accurate to say that my

research draws on some of the principles of action research, while still recognising that it is perhaps more closely aligned to the 'teacher-as-researcher' movement as theorised by Stenhouse (quoted in Cohen et al., 2011, p. 348).

As a member of staff at Beechgrove College, I need to be mindful of the debate surrounding the value of 'insider research'. According to Morse (1998) 'the dual roles of investigator and employee are incompatible, and they may place the researcher in an untenable position' (p. 61). This is because insiders are perceived to have a personal stake and emotional investment in the setting, and so lack the distance and objectivity deemed to be necessary for valid research. Indeed I have chosen this project as a result of several years of experience working with LAC. I may therefore have assumptions and ideas about what I expect to find out and, on the basis of professional experience, have a theoretical stance before beginning the project. Gummesson (2000) uses the term 'preunderstanding' to describe the knowledge, insights and experience that people have before they engage in a research programme. This issue can be addressed by reflexivity where checks are carried out by an external reviewer. The involvement of Steve (from the BST) helped to ensure that my current thinking was exposed to alternative reframing. Steve was presented with the variety of data I had gathered regarding Michael's behaviour – see Table 2. This meant that the design of the intervention was collaborative, rather than being a fulfilment of any initial prejudices or suspicions that I had. The external perspective helped to stimulate reflexive awareness, allowing me to engage with the data in a more critical manner. This paragraph highlights one of the methodological issues I have faced as a part-time postgraduate student working full-time in the teaching profession. I have, as Drake & Heath (2008) outline, been searching for methodologies that enable me to be 'simultaneously practitioner and researcher' (p. 129).

In contrast to Morse, Brannick & Coghlan (2007) believe that research can be strengthened by being 'native'. Inquiry from the inside involves researchers as actors immersed in local situations generating contextually embedded knowledge that emerges from experience. My own participation allows the study to benefit from insider knowledge accruing to a 'situated perspective' (Thompson, 2007, p. 45). An external researcher would not be able to replicate this 'lived experience'. Being an insider also facilitates primary access, which is often a major obstacle when it comes to research involving LAC. As Vice Principal (with responsibility for LAC at Beechgrove College) I also benefit from secondary access to confidential material that, due to the hierarchical nature of schools, would not be available to most other members of staff e.g. details of Michael's abuse, Minutes from LAC Reviews. This status also allows me access to more networks (both internal and external) e.g. the authority to organise whole staff training, the ability to involve the BST. These points hopefully serve to reaffirm the potential of research by teachers. Indeed MacDonald and Walker (quoted in Simons, 1989, p. 124) have written that 'a specialist research profession will always be a poor substitute for a self-monitoring educational community'.

4.2 Data collected in the study

The following table summarises the data that was collected to help design and evaluate the intervention.

Table 2 - Summary of the data collected as part of the research.

Method	Information Source	Potential numbers	Participating numbers	Used to DESIGN intervention	Used to EVALUATE intervention
SDQ	Michael	1	1	Yes	Yes *
	Teachers	14	14	Yes	Yes *
	Foster carer	1	1	Yes	No
Interviews	Michael	1	1	Yes	Yes *
	Teachers	4	4	Yes	Yes *
	Foster carer	1	1	Yes	No
Archival records	Minutes of LAC Reviews and Core Group meetings	n/a	n/a	Yes	No
Behaviour records	SIMS (Behaviour entries)	n/a	n/a	Yes	Yes
Ongoing observation	My reflective journal	n/a	n/a	Yes	Yes
Evaluation of training	Staff Questionnaire	56	56	No	Yes

* Indicates follow-up i.e. SDQ and interviews were also administered three months after the intervention.

Having read an article by Goodman & Goodman (2009), I was keen to explore the potential of using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). Stein (1997) reinforces the importance of an assessment stage, as successful identification of need is crucial in the formulation of interventions for LAC. The SDQ is a questionnaire which is increasingly used to assess the psychosocial development of LAC - indeed since 2009, all local authorities in England are required to administer the SDQ annually to the primary carers of all LAC aged 4-16. It can be administered to teachers, carers, and children aged 11 or over – there are separately designed questionnaires for each of these groupings

(copies of which are included in Appendices A & B). The SDQ consists of 25 statements which are divided equally between the following scales - Emotional Symptoms, Conduct Problems, Hyperactivity, Peer Problems and Prosocial. For each statement, the respondent has to mark whether it is 'Not True' (scores 0), 'Somewhat True' (scores 1) or 'Certainly True' (scores 2). The score for each of the five scales is generated by summing the scores for the five statements that make up that scale, thereby generating a scale score ranging from 0 to 10. The scores for Emotional Symptoms, Conduct Problems, Hyperactivity, and Peer Problems can be summed to generate a Total Difficulties Score ranging from 0 to 40 – with 'high' SDQ scores predicting much greater rates of disorder than 'low' scores. The Prosocial Score is not incorporated into the Total Difficulties Score since the absence of prosocial behaviours is conceptually different from the presence of psychological difficulties. Appendix C provides more detail on the scoring of the SDQ.

A major strength of the SDQ is its simplicity, with participants only having to decide between three options in response to a limited number of statements. Having been aware of difficulties with the response rates of other screening questionnaires, Richards et al. (2006) link their 100% completion rate to the SDQ's short and user-friendly format – which is particularly important for professionals not working in mental health services. This is very pertinent, given that it is Michael, his teachers, and foster parent, who will be completing the SDQ.

An additional advantage of the SDQ is that it allows us to compare the scores of the aforementioned respondents. McAuley & Trew (2000) have highlighted the importance of obtaining such data from multiple sources. This is because children's observable

behaviour, competencies and problems are likely to differ from one context to another, such as home versus school. Children may act out at school because of extra demands placed on them in that setting e.g. the challenges of academic work, maintaining peer relationships. Indeed children's behaviour can vary dramatically in different classrooms/subjects and so there may be a lack of uniformity in teacher ratings. Rosenthal & Curiel (2006) also raise a significant issue with regards to studying an identifiable group of children, such as LAC. Teachers may make certain assumptions about LAC based on their membership of that group, and report higher problem levels because this is their expectation. However it should also be recognised that teachers may offer a more objective point of view than foster parents as they are in a position to compare the behaviour of a child in relation to his/her peers. Richards et al. (2006) found that when young people complete the SDQ, they report lower levels of difficulties than do their carer/teacher, which can make it more difficult for young people to accept the rationale for engaging with intervention strategies. It also reinforces that a lack of agreement in the SDQ scores (generated from Michael, his teachers and foster parent), does not necessarily indicate poor reliability of this assessment tool.

I asked Michael's 12 subject teachers to complete a SDQ for him. Given their pastoral experience of working with Michael, I also felt it was important to include his Form Tutor and Head of Year in the sample. The questionnaires were administered in January 2015, which means that all of the staff in the sample (with one exception) have accrued knowledge of Michael's behavioural difficulties since his arrival at Beechgrove College in September 2013. The one exception is due to a change in Michael's French teacher between Years 9 and 10. This experience helped to ensure that teachers completed the SDQ in an informed manner. Following an analysis of scores, I then carried out semi-

structured interviews with four members of staff. These were selected in a purposive manner. They included the two teachers who had given Michael the highest Total Difficulties Score in the SDQ (these two individuals also awarded the highest scores in the following sub-categories – Conduct Problems and Hyperactivity). These interviews would allow me to explore in greater depth the challenging behaviour of Michael within the classroom. The member of staff who awarded the lowest Total Difficulties Score was also interviewed – the same teacher also recorded the lowest score in respect of Conduct Problems and Hyperactivity. This interview was expected to perhaps shed light on the strategies and/or approach that could be used to help mitigate Michael's behavioural difficulties. I also chose to interview Michael's Form Tutor given her dealings with him on a daily basis. All of the individuals who were interviewed as part of this research agreed to them being recorded and transcribed. The interviews employed semi-structured schedules (see Appendix D) which ensured that all key areas were covered with each informant, whilst also providing an opportunity for specific subjects to be developed or new ones raised, as appropriate.

Triangulation is a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity which is one of the reasons for using multiple sources of data to address the research questions. This approach also recognises the many variables operating in respect of Michael's behavioural issues. The different sources of evidence (as listed in Table 2) are therefore needed to capture this complexity.

Both qualitative and quantitative data emerged from the above sources. This blending helps with triangulation as, according to Cohen et al. (2011), 'the more methods contrast with each other, the greater the researcher's confidence' (p. 195). For example, I will

have more confidence in my findings if the SDQ scores correspond to my own observations of Michael's behaviour. Yin (2009) reaffirms such an approach, as a wide range of methods and sources of evidence is needed in order to shed light on the phenomenon being studied. He also points out that case studies should not be confused with qualitative research as they can be based on any combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence.

4.3 Ethical issues

Throughout the research it was vital that I adhered to high ethical standards - guidelines from the British Educational Research Association (2011) were used as a benchmark. I recognised that for the majority of the participants, I was entering into a research relationship with them for the first time. In such circumstances trust can be fragile and provisional, and therefore has to be won, and not assumed. The fact that my research proposal and procedures were formally ratified by the University of Oxford proved to be important in facilitating the growth of such trust, and in ensuring its survival. This also reassured social services - due to their corporate responsibility, it was necessary to receive consent from Michael's social worker. Simons (1989) reminds us that such formality should not be viewed as the antithesis of trust, but rather the necessary conditions for it. As such, voluntary consent was sought from all participants. They were also assured of confidentiality in respect of the data being collected. The only exception to confidentiality was if the research revealed any safeguarding concerns – participants were advised that if this occurred, the procedures laid out in 'Pastoral Care in Schools' (Department of Education Northern Ireland, 1999) would be followed. Participants agreed that excerpts from interview transcripts could be used generically, but that this would not be in an attributable form. At all times, pseudonyms have been used for the school's name, and the name of any participants. Data gathered as part of the research was held securely in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 – accessible only by me and my Supervisor.

The consent form for Michael was adapted to make it easier for him to understand the research proposal and the ethical standards that we were endeavouring to uphold. However the case study approach did raise an ethical tension, and required me to think

critically. As the research would involve a close-up portrayal of Michael, it was likely that he would be identifiable to some of the research participants – which could prove threatening. I took time to explain this to Michael, prior to him giving his consent. I was always mindful of the fact that the right to privacy accorded to Michael took precedence over my right to generate public knowledge.

An article by Kelly (1989) made me cognisant of two other ethical issues raised by the research – namely, the transmission of values, and gaining the informed consent of teachers. I was not a neutral outsider, observing and recording the participants' views; on the contrary I was concerned with changing the current position in Beechgrove College. In such instances, considerations of conscious reflexivity are strongly recommended by Lincoln & Guba (1990), which required me to be self-examining, self-questioning, self-challenging, self-critical and self-correcting. I see intervention in schools as one small part of the mosaic of action to ameliorate the subordinate position that LAC have in education and society as a whole. I feel strongly that it is important – indeed it is ethically right – to promote the educational achievement of LAC. As such, this assignment may not be regarded as value-free, objective or neutral research, and the reader may have to take this into account when assessing the findings.

In terms of encouraging their involvement, it was much easier to explain to teachers that we were researching Michael's behavioural issues than to stress our interest in how they try to manage these in the classroom. It was difficult to say to teachers that you want to co-operate with them in improving the status-quo – but incidentally, you think they might be part of the problem. Although this may have been implicit (i.e. staff development was the basis of the intervention), it was probably not stressed as much as it should have been

for truly ‘informed consent’. This may have led teachers to be less guarded in their comments than if they had been constantly aware that anything they said might be ‘taken down and used in evidence’ against them.

Throughout this piece of research I was also mindful of the ethical principles that were the foundation of the Care Inquiry (2013a) and NICE/SCIE (2010) reports which are both quoted in Luke et al. (2014, p. 13). These required practitioners to listen to and empower LAC and tailor specific interventions to their particular circumstances – two aspects which I have endeavoured to address.

5. Findings

5.1 Has Michael's behaviour improved?

I will start by analysing the SDQ data collected from the various participants (as shown in Table 2). The discussion also draws on the qualitative data from the interviews undertaken with Michael, his foster carer and a selection of his teachers. My reflective journal and archival records provides further observations and reactions which have helped to shape the following discussion.

Table 3 is a collation of responses from the 14 teachers who completed the SDQ in respect of Michael. The follow-up SDQ scores (completed 3 months after the intervention) are shown in brackets. Table 4 helps with the interpretation of such scores.

Table 3 – SDQ data collected from Michael's teachers.

SDQ - Teachers	Average score	Highest score	Lowest score
Total Difficulties Score (out of 40)	25.5 (25.7)	31 (30)	20 (20)
Emotional Symptoms Score (out of 10)	4.9 (4.7)	6 (6)	2 (2)
Conduct Problem Score (out of 10)	6.2 (6.4)	8 (9)	4 (4)
Hyperactivity Score (out of 10)	8.3 (8.4)	10 (10)	7 (6)
Peer Problem Score (out of 10)	6.1 (6.2)	8 (9)	3 (3)
Prosocial Behaviour Score (out of 10)	2.9 (3.0)	5 (6)	2 (3)

Table 4 - Interpretation of SDQ data.

SDQ - Teachers	Score is close to average – significant problems in this area are unlikely	Score is slightly raised, which may reflect significant problems	Score is high - substantial risk of significant problems in this area
Total Difficulties Score (out of 40)	0-11	12-15	16-40
Emotional Symptoms Score (out of 10)	0-4	5	6-10
Conduct Problem Score (out of 10)	0-2	3	4-10
Hyperactivity Score (out of 10)	0-5	6	7-10
Peer Problem Score (out of 10)	0-3	4	5-10
Prosocial Behaviour Score (out of 10)	6-10	5	0-4

To help design and evaluate the intervention, I also got Michael and his foster carer to complete a SDQ – like the teachers, I asked both of them to complete a follow-up SDQ three months after the intervention (follow-up scores are in brackets). The respective results for each of these participants are shown below.

Table 5 – SDQ data provided by Michael.

SDQ – Michael	**Michael's responses**	Score is close to average – significant problems in this area are unlikely	Score is slightly raised - may reflect significant problems	Score is high - substantial risk of significant problems in this area
Total Difficulties Score (out of 40)	24 (23)	0-15	16-19	20-40
Emotional Symptoms Score (out of 10)	5 (6)	0-5	6	7-10
Conduct Problem Score (out of 10)	6 (6)	0-3	4	5-10
Hyperactivity Score (out of 10)	7 (6)	0-5	6	7-10
Peer Problem Score (out of 10)	6 (5)	0-3	4-5	6-10
Prosocial Behaviour Score (out of 10)	5 (5)	6-10	5	0-4

Table 6 – SDQ data provided by Michael's foster carer.

SDQ – Foster carer	**Foster carer's responses**	Score is close to average – significant problems in this area are unlikely	Score is slightly raised, may reflect significant problems	Score is high - substantial risk of significant problems in this area
Total Difficulties Score (out of 40)	18 (22)	0-13	14-16	17-40
Emotional Symptoms Score (out of 10)	4 (5)	0-3	4	5-10
Conduct Problem Score (out of 10)	4 (5)	0-2	3	4-10
Hyperactivity Score (out of 10)	6 (7)	0-5	6	7-10
Peer Problem Score (out of 10)	4 (5)	0-2	3	4-10
Prosocial Behaviour Score (out of 10)	5 (5)	6-10	5	0-4

When we compare the follow-up SDQ scores with the initial baseline, the results are not significantly different. With reference to the teacher scores, there has actually been an increase of 0.2 in the Total Difficulties Score. Indeed over the same 3 month period the Conduct Problem Score increased from 6.2 to 6.4. Follow-up scores for all 5 scales remain comfortably within the boundaries which indicate that significant problems still exist (and in all but one case, appear to have become slightly accentuated). Michael's own scoring showed a very modest 1 point decrease in the Total Difficulties Score and there were no significant changes in any of the 5 scales. These are certainly not the results that I would have wanted to achieve at the outset, and one could rightly question whether the training of staff has had any ameliorating effect on Michael's behaviour. Of course it is also possible that three months is an insufficient period over which to secure such change.

A number of other factors may also have contributed to this pattern of responses. For example, there had been a noticeable deterioration in Michael's behaviour during the

month of March – at the end of which was when the follow-up SDQs were administered. Michael had received three after school detentions during this period, and there were five other entries on the school's Behaviour Management log. It was also a bad sign when one teacher even approached me to enquire whether they should complete the SDQ in a manner that would show improvement in Michael's behaviour, or if they should complete it honestly. Following this question, I contacted each of Michael's teachers to stress that I was after an honest appraisal of his behaviour.

I was becoming increasingly concerned about Michael's behaviour, and was able to share this with his social worker and foster parent at a Core Group Meeting (one week before the follow-up SDQs were completed). At this meeting I was informed that Social Services were looking for a new foster placement for Michael. This change in circumstances had been precipitated by one of the foster parents being diagnosed with a significant medical condition.

Looking back at my reflective journal, I recorded feelings of shock and disappointment in the aftermath of this Meeting – why hadn't the social worker informed me at an earlier stage that Michael's foster placement would be changing? Given that Social Services had already identified a potential new placement for Michael, it was apparent that I had been kept in the dark for a considerable period of time. As it turns out, the foster parents had informed the social worker of their change in circumstances in mid-February, with Michael being informed of this at the start of March – which was when his behaviour began to deteriorate. I was exasperated by the fact that we as a school were endeavouring to help Michael, and yet crucial information regarding his foster placement was being withheld. Surely the social worker, from whom consent for the research was sought,

would have realised the potential impact that such news could have on Michael's behaviour – being forewarned would have allowed us to be forearmed. I was at least relieved to hear that Michael's new foster placement would allow him to continue attending Beechgrove College, providing some form of continuity during a turbulent time. I was mindful of the research by Bernedo et al. (2012) which found that 78% of LAC had to change schools when they moved to another foster placement, as well as Jackson's (1998) contention that keeping children in the same school has to be a top priority.

However, as the literature suggests, it may be more appropriate to attribute blame to the system rather than the individual social worker. The situation I have described perhaps reflects the low priority accorded to education in care planning, despite the crucial role that schools play in a child's developmental trajectory. Indeed according to Gilligan (1998), 'schools seem remarkably invisible in the field of child and family social work' (p. 13). The fact that I was encountering this lack of collaboration in 2015 was both soporific and dispiriting, but perhaps not surprising. Fletcher-Campbell (1998) describes such poor liaison as 'a stubborn, recurrent, war-horse of an issue if ever there was one' (p. 7).

This realisation also made me reflect on whether my intervention should instead have focused on forging a closer relationship with Michael's social worker. Of course, 'inter-agency collaboration is easier to conceptualise than it is to deliver' (Whyte, 1997, p. 701), but the situation which I have described would justify tackling such professional boundaries. The fragmented relationship between myself and the social worker (which became clearer in hindsight) meant that there was a failure to share important information

which was affecting Michael's behaviour and negatively impacting his education. I could associate with the educators in Coulling's (2000) study who expressed their frustration at being unable to obtain important information from caseworkers in a timely or comprehensive manner. The whole experience resonates with Jackson's (2007) conclusion that 'at present, children in care are causalities of the gulf between our education and care systems' (p. 3). Perhaps this problem is accentuated in N. Ireland where to date, the position of Virtual School Head (for LAC) has not been created and so the responsibility for the education of LAC is less well defined. This instance also shows how the care environment can contribute to the further disadvantage of LAC, and how education is inextricably interwoven in the crises and difficulties that children like Michael face.

The change in circumstances makes it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the staff training. Ideally, all other variables would have remained constant in the post-intervention environment. This is clearly not the case given the news of the disruption to Michael's foster placement. Therefore using the follow-up SDQ scores as a method of evaluation would be far from valid due to the difficultly of disentangling the effects of placement disruption from the impact of the staff training. Indeed this situation has caused me to reflect on my initial belief that I would be able to accurately measure the impact of staff training on Michael's behaviour. Given the nature of the care environment, one has to recognise, as Coman & Devaney (2011) do, that outcomes tend to reflect the interplay of multiple factors rather than have single factor causality. In such a complex system, it becomes very difficult to isolate the effect of one variable from all of the others. The ecological perspective that these authors put forward appears to more accurately reflect the reality for LAC.

The data suggests that disruption to foster placement negatively affected Michael's behaviour – this corresponds with research by Newton et al. (2000) which identified placement instability as a significant risk factor for LAC. At the outset, I did not think I would be addressing this issue – it was certainly not one of my research questions. So while apologising for this unexpected departure, the irony is that it may more accurately portray the turbulence that LAC face in their lives. It also reinforces the appropriateness of the case study approach that I've adopted. As Yin (2009) would assert, the fine grain nature of the case study can help portray a participant's lived experiences, the detail (and impact) of which may be lost in larger-scale data-sets.

It is notable that the follow-up SDQ completed by the foster carer revealed a much larger increase in the Total Difficulties Score (4 points) compared to what the teachers had recorded (0.2 points). During the Core Group Meeting the foster parent reported that Michael's behaviour deteriorated in the aftermath of being informed of the change in placement. Unfortunately the foster parent chose not to take part in the follow-up interview, so I was unable to explore these changes in greater detail. However compared to the initial SDQ their response to 'Often loses temper' had changed from 'Somewhat True' to 'Certainly True', while for 'Many worries or often seems worried' the response had moved from 'Not True' to 'Certainly True'. Michael's own response to the statement 'I worry a lot' also changed over the period of the intervention – from an initial response of 'Somewhat True' to one of 'Certainly True'. This explains the increase which occurred in the 'Emotional Symptoms Scale' from 5/10 (pre-intervention) to 6/10 (post-intervention). I raised this with Michael during the follow-up interview, and a number of

his responses indicated the worries he was experiencing in relation to changing foster placements. For example, he commented:

> I like where I am now, I don't want to move to another foster home. I don't even know where that's going to be.

I should point out that it was Michael who raised the issue of placement disruption - I was careful not to mention this pre-emptively. It is worth noting that I felt somewhat inhibited during the follow-up interview - I was very aware of the need to tread carefully in order to avoid causing any extra upset or anguish to Michael. To offer support, I did recommend the school's independent counselling service, and felt that it was a positive step when Michael later made a self-referral to this facility. Jackson (2013) has pointed out that the disrupted attachment histories of many LAC make them disinclined to ask for, or accept help. McAuley & Trew (2000) also refer to the emotional rollercoaster that LAC experience when confronted with a change in foster placement, which is borne out by the data. Having experienced serial loss and rejection in the past, LAC already arrive in school with disrupted attachment histories, and so further change is likely to compound the problem. As such, the argument put forward by Bernedo et al. (2012) – volatility exacerbates behavioural issues - appears to be well founded. My research also suggests that attributing poor behaviour solely to the pre-care experience is remiss. Having been informed that his foster placement was changing, Michael's behaviour deteriorated. This helped to elucidate Jackson's (1998) argument that the care system can all too often reinforce early disadvantage rather than helping children to overcome it.

It is perhaps some consolation that the follow-up Total Difficulties Score for teachers had only increased by 0.2 compared to the pre-intervention score. We might have expected Michael's behaviour in school to have deteriorated more given the news that he had

received regarding his foster placement. One could even hypothesise that the situation in school would have been worse had it not been for the training that had taken place. It is also worth recognising that the data indicated some improvement in Michael's behaviour between the intervention taking place and just before him being informed about the change of foster placement. During this two-month period, Michael only received one after school detention – in the 2013-14 academic year he averaged 1.9 detentions per month. Indeed on one occasion when I bumped into Michael in the corridors, he proudly boasted about this improved record. My reflective journal also recorded a number of conversations with staff which intimated that Michael was becoming less disruptive and defiant. In hindsight, had I known about the disruption to Michael's foster placement, I may well have been justified in reducing the evaluative period so as to try and isolate the effects of this unanticipated influence. However I still had access to a wide range of data which allowed me to further reflect on the effectiveness of the staff training. Although the intervention has not moved the SDQ data in the desired direction, there may still be some positive outcomes.

5.2 Changes in teacher attitudes, knowledge and understanding

We must remember that at the outset of this research, Michael was at risk of being excluded from school given his behavioural issues. The intervention was designed to reduce this risk, as such an outcome would likely have a negative impact on his educational progress. The training was designed to increase teacher awareness of the challenges of the classroom context for Michael, given his profile of disrupted attachment and early childhood trauma. I therefore wanted to assess whether the beliefs/attitudes of teachers had been impacted upon by the training, enabling them to better understand and manage Michael's disruptive behaviour.

Based on data collected from their evaluations of the training, 46 members of staff (out of a total of 56) responded 'None' to a question which asked, 'What prior knowledge of Attachment Theory did you have before the training?' This is unsurprising – Luke et al. (2014) recognised that for most teachers, this theory would not have been covered during their period of initial teacher education. However it is significant, given the relevance of this theory for helping teachers to understand what underpins the challenging behaviour with which LAC can present. Addressing this deficit was therefore a key objective of the training – I was mindful of Scherr's (2007) observation that school systems are often unprepared for the challenges that LAC pose. Feedback from the evaluation forms also indicated that when confronted with disruptive behaviour in the future, teachers would be more willing to respond to Michael with increased empathy. Some comments from the Evaluation Forms are shown below.

> I really didn't appreciate the difficulties that LAC face – it was a bit of an eye opener. The information on attachment was really informative and will cause me to react differently in the classroom.

> The section on attachment was very interesting. When you hear about the continual rejection that these children have faced, you just can't ignore that in terms of how it must impact on their behaviour.

These comments reinforce the importance of teachers having an understanding of attachment theory as it allows them to see more clearly what underpins the behaviour of LAC – indeed the literature suggests that the provision of such training is an essential step in supporting professionals (Cameron & Maginn, 2009; Honey et al., 2011). It was also heartening that 41 out of 56 teachers responded 'Certainly True' to the following statement on the Evaluation Form – 'I found the training useful and will be able to apply it in the classroom' - with the other 15 teachers responding 'Somewhat True'.

I was particularly taken by the comments made by one teacher during the post-intervention interviews – the transcript excerpt is shown below.

> The attachment training got me thinking. People probably think that I'm one of those teachers who is long in the tooth and won't change their ways. But I'm open to new things, so long as there's a rationale for it. I've used the timeout facility with Michael, which has helped.

This individual recorded the highest Total Difficulties Score for Michael prior to the training. It also became clear from my initial interview with this teacher that he was interpreting Michael's poor behaviour as a direct and personal challenge to his authority, whereas the training would have attributed the behaviour to unmet emotional needs. Paradoxically, the authoritarian management style of the teacher was resulting in yet more disruptive behaviour from Michael who was interpreting the teacher's tougher response as unfair and personal. These were indeed sentiments that Michael intimated during my initial interview with him, commenting that 'there are some teachers who just constantly pick on me'. This type of data helped inform the design of the intervention,

with the resultant training being seen as an opportunity to break what was clearly a vicious cycle.

A section of the above transcript is also worth highlighting - where the teacher states that they are 'open to new things, so long as there's a *rationale* for it'. A key objective of the training was to inform staff of these very reasons. As Slade & Wissow (2007) contend, this understanding enables teachers to consider the underlying message which the young person is conveying through their behaviour, and to respond with a more empathetic management approach. The teacher's use of a 'time-out' facility, as recommended during the training, certainly represents a more enlightened approach. Of course we cannot generalise from the evaluation provided by just one teacher. However considering their authoritarian style, and the accommodation they have made post-training, this contribution is significant. It can also be triangulated with data from the Evaluation Forms, with 49 out of 56 teachers responding 'Certainly True' to the following statement – 'I now better understand why LAC can sometimes present with challenging behaviour'. Michael also recognised some of the changes we have just mentioned. A selection of pertinent statements he made during the follow-up interview are shown below:

- Some teachers aren't picking on me anymore.
- I don't get shouted at as much.
- He's [referring to a teacher] actually being quite nice to me at the minute.

5.3 The role of the educational psychologist

A number of staff (19 referred specifically to it on the Evaluation Form) commented very positively on the presentation given by Mary, the educational psychologist. This part of the training focused on the impact that early childhood trauma can have on brain development – Mary eloquently explained a number of important concepts:

- Prefrontal cortex – this part of the brain orchestrates our thoughts and actions;
- Amygdala – the brain's emotion and fear centre;
- Hippocampus – helps to decide whether something is truly dangerous.

Staff were informed that maltreatment reduces the regulatory function of the hippocampus, which means that these children might lose the contextual ability to judge when they should and shouldn't be afraid. Mary was reinforcing the research by Welbourne & Leeson (2012) i.e. in the classroom, LAC may suffer chronic activation of fear responses, causing over-reaction to triggers that others find non-threatening. This heightened sensitivity helps to explain why LAC can present with behaviour that is hostile and aggressive. Although counterproductive in a classroom context, these ingrained responses may have served them well as defensive adaptations to the maltreatment experienced in the pre-care environment. It has to be said however, that not all hostile or aggressive reactions stem from experiences of maltreatment as there are other reasons that might explain these behaviours – an example here is learned behaviours.

A comment made by a teacher (shown below) during one of the post-intervention interviews helps to reaffirm the impact of Mary's presentation, and reinforces the

assertion by Honey et al. (2011) that educational psychologists are well placed to deliver this type of training in schools.

> I'll never forget the differences in the brain scans between an abused child and one which has been brought up in a caring and loving home. It's then easy to see why things like behaviour are affected.

At this point it should be noted that authors such as Bruer (1999) would point to the lack of robust evidence which supports the impact of maltreatment/neglect on brain development in such an easily reducible form. In any case, Mary's involvement contributes to the social milieu which Altshuler (2003) feels is so desperately needed to help LAC with behavioural issues. The excerpt shown above is also further evidence that training could be the trigger mechanism for teachers to alter their perceptions and attitudes with regard to Michael's behaviour. It may encourage them to abandon the deficit model of LAC as challenging learners. One of the aims of the training was for teachers to acquire a deeper understanding of the relationship between negative early experiences, the resulting impairment of emotional and intellectual attributes, and the challenge of the classroom context. If the training has contributed to a reorientation of teacher attitudes towards LAC, it is also more likely that the positive impact of the intervention can be sustained in the long-term. It is also further evidence that the continuing professional development of staff can help to ameliorate Michael's behavioural issues.

5.4 A note of caution

Analysis of the teachers' feedback on the training picked up on the sympathy that teachers were feeling in relation to Michael's situation. Indeed the word/phrase 'sympathy'/'feeling sorry for', was used by 13 out of the 56 teachers completing the form. The following excerpt from the transcript of one of the post-intervention interviews helps to triangulate this observation.

> You can't help but have sympathy for Michael …… obviously he's had a very distressing childhood. So when it comes to the work that he's able to produce, I'm going to take this into account.

The rationale for the training was for teachers to acquire a better understanding of the reasons for Michael's behavioural issues. But we must ensure that feelings of empathy don't translate into low expectations - I have been left wondering whether such labelling has been an unexpected outcome of the training. Comments made by Michael during my follow-up interview with him reinforce this concern. For example, he said that, 'I don't seem to get into as much trouble now for not doing some of my homeworks'. A scoping review by Forsman & Vinnerljung (2012) found that it was not uncommon for teachers to have pessimistic expectations regarding foster children's school performance, which often do not rhyme with their cognitive ability. Of course these expectations may stem from well-intentioned assumptions that children (like Michael) who have endured traumatic events in their lives simply cannot take advantage of learning opportunities. However they are also concerning given the self-fulfilling relationship between teacher expectations and pupil performance described by Heath et al. (1994). As such, if I was designing the intervention again, I would also want it to focus on teacher aspirations so as to engender confidence and belief in the capacities of LAC.

One of the Michael's statements during the follow-up interview (shown below) is also worthy of mention – this was the basis for why History was still his favourite subject.

> She's the best teacher. It's just …… she's always been nice to me and she never shouts. But she's also a really good teacher and I normally get all my work done for her.

This made me relate to an article by Dent & Cameron (2003), who approach the issue of LAC from an educational psychology perspective. In terms of later development outcomes for children, they identified an authoritative parenting style as being the most effective. Authoritative parents are those who are able to maintain a balance between having high levels of demand/expectation for their children, yet also provide a high level of responsiveness/care in the form of warmth, supportiveness and dependability. In terms of foster care, this style of parenting has also been found to promote attachment security (Gabler et al., 2014). In my mind, being both highly demanding and highly responsive is the approach that schools should be championing when dealing with pupils like Michael. And yet I have not come across an instance in the readings where, in relation to LAC, an 'authoritative' teaching style is being advocated - albeit, I am a MSc. student with limited experience of this literature.

An 'authoritative' approach has parallels with the term 'sensitive responsiveness', which was coined by Mary Ainsworth (quoted in Stevenson-Hinde, 2007, p. 339). To promote secure attachment, Stevenson-Hinde (2007) emphasises the crucial skill of the caregiver being able to accurately read emotional signals and respond appropriately. However again, these concepts do not appear to have significantly traversed into the educational literature. In the literature review I quoted more recent research on attachment theory which highlighted the importance of non-maternal caregivers in children's lives (Geddes,

2006). Geddes identified the teacher as a 'specific attachment person' (p. 49) but this therapeutic role crucially relies on the attitudes, beliefs and aspirations of these professionals. It is significant that Michael's explanation for History being his favourite subject is strongly associated with the teacher's approach, which may be promoting his attachment security. In relation to LAC, I would contend that the aim of continuing professional development for teachers should be to promote an authoritative approach. In hindsight, I feel that the training which took place in Beechgrove College focused exclusively on encouraging teachers to be more responsive/sensitive to Michael's behavioural issues. Although this in itself represents a positive step forward, it should be matched by an approach that engenders high aspirations for LAC.

5.5 The importance of Michael's involvement

At the outset, it was felt that the success of the intervention would in part be linked to its careful design. Some features which I feel strengthened the design have already been mentioned e.g. availing of support from the BST; involving an educational psychologist; identifying attachment theory as a relevant theoretical framework. However I would like to take a little more time to examine one design feature which was felt to be particularly significant and innovative, namely Michael's involvement. My efforts to involve Michael provided rich data that contributed positively to the intervention. As a first step, I got him to self-complete a SDQ (the results have already been displayed in Table 5). I allowed Michael some time to compare his own SDQ scores with those generated by his teachers. Most notably, Michael's scoring revealed a Total Difficulties Score which equates to a 'significant risk of substantial problems'. Indeed his points score is only 1.5 below the average reported by his teachers, indicating that Michael is not ignorant of his own difficulties – indeed he stated that, 'those scores from my teachers seem fair enough as I do get into trouble quite a bit'. The borderline nature of some of Michael's own scores is a noteworthy contrast, as the teacher scores were all indicating that a significant problem existed. This is in line with research by Richards et al. (2006) – they found that LAC report lower levels of difficulties than do their teachers, which can present problems in terms of LAC engaging with interventions. However during my time with Michael, he was very open and honest in recognising his behavioural difficulties, and appeared determined to address the situation.

I pointed out to Michael that the highest scores provided by himself and his teachers related to Conduct/Hyperactivity and highlighted the relevant questions for each of these categories. For Hyperactivity, these included symptoms like restlessness, fidgeting, poor

attention span and being easily distracted. In response, Michael commented, 'I just can't help those things, it's just the way I am, so it's a bit unfair that I get into trouble'. This is an interesting remark, which I was able to relate to research by Cameron & Maginn (2009). These authors argue that such behaviours are reflective of unmet emotional needs, which given his history, would certainly be relevant to Michael. Michael's comment that 'it's just the way I am' has legitimacy as his hyperactivity may be strongly linked to the emotional abuse he suffered in the pre-care environment. This input from Michael influenced the design of the training so that it enabled teachers to look beneath the overt behaviour, and instead consider the underlying message he is trying to convey and to respond in a more empathetic manner.

One of Michael's comments was particularly pertinent – 'Some of the teachers just don't realise what I've been through'. This struck accord with research by Ferguson & Wolkow (2012) where LAC expressed concern that teachers did not understand their circumstances. I explained to Michael that we were trying to address this lack of understanding through the proposed staff training – to which he responded very positively, stating 'that would be good, I think that would really help'. This served to reinforce the content of the training, which was to raise staff awareness of the challenges associated with being in care. I was also mindful of research by Jackson (1998) which identified that LAC have real concerns around the sharing of information about their care status. I therefore asked Michael whether he was comfortable for teachers at Beechgrove College to be made aware of this. His response was challenging as he replied, 'What do you think'? I have to admit to my answer being strongly influenced by Fletcher-Campbell (1998) who concluded:

> As they are looked after, the structure of their lives is not `normal' and the `normal' channels of support, designed for the school population at large,

> are inadequate, without a special understanding, to meet the particular profile of these young people's needs. (p. 9)

If we want teachers to display '*a special understanding*' then they need to know the pupils to whom this should apply. Michael accepted this rationale, and I provided reassurance that it would only be teachers, and not pupils, who would know about him being in foster care. Interestingly he replied, 'sure most of them [i.e. pupils] know that anyway'. I explored this a little further and it was clear that Michael felt he was at times being targeted because of his care status. He mentioned a few occasions where derogatory comments had been made about his biological mother, which he found hurtful. This was an opportunity for me to reinforce to Michael that such comments are unacceptable, and that he should come to me personally if further instances of this occurred. I do feel that Michael appreciated these sentiments and also the time that had been given for his voice to be heard. On the way out he said 'Thanks Sir', although the typescript does not get across how genuinely he expressed this.

It is my belief that the intervention was strengthened as a result of Michael's involvement. At this juncture it is worth re-emphasising comments by Luke et al. (2014) on the paucity of research that incorporates the views of care recipients, and even less in terms of allowing LAC to contribute to interventions that are designed to help them. My approach has made the research more participatory and has helped Michael to recognise that he is not 'a powerless actor in a drama written by others' (Woodier, 2011, p. 262). The rights of children to be consulted on their needs and wishes is enshrined in the 1989 Children Act, which I pointed out to Michael. According to Atkinson (quoted in Oliver, 2006, p. 140) 'this sense of social inclusion has particular resonance for LAC, many of

whom describe their experience of the care system as coinciding with a loss of individuality and respect'.

5.6 The role of teachers and the foster carer in the design stage

The design of the intervention was further strengthened by taking cognisance of the initial data gathered from Michael's foster carer and teachers. In relation to the latter, the average Total Difficulties Score of 25.5/40 is comfortably into the boundary which indicates that a significant problem exists – this in itself is a motive for intervening. Although the highest average score is for Hyperactivity (8.3/10), the most elevated score (in relation to the threshold) is for Conduct Problems. It is interesting that for both of the aforementioned categories, the lowest scores awarded by any of the 14 teachers still shows that a significant problem exists. Within the Conduct Problem Scale, 12 of Michael's teachers awarded 'Certainly True' to a question which was worded, 'Often loses temper'. This was also a common thread that emerged from the teacher interviews, and was therefore something that our intervention had to help address. Statements from the two teachers who awarded Michael the highest Total Difficulties Score are shown below.

> He's got a short fuse, and is very unpredictable. You always feel on edge with Michael.
>
> Michael can go from being calm and collected to being highly disruptive, and all in very quick time.

What also emerged from the teacher interviews was that a significant number of Michael's behavioural incidents relate to hyperactivity. It appears that these minor misdemeanours can then quickly escalate into more serious incidents. One of the teachers noted:

> It's almost as if Michael is deliberately trying to cause conflict. When you give him a simple instruction, like 'keep quiet' or 'turn around', he can be very defiant. He then just ends up getting into more trouble.

The same teacher went on to articulate a problem which the Department for Education and Skills (2004) confirms is a common one in relation to LAC – which is that staff find it challenging to make allowances for unacceptable behaviour while giving the right messages to other pupils. My reflective journal noted occasions when Michael has used offensive language (both in class and during social time), particularly when he's escalated. This has presented the school with a significant problem as the automatic sanction for swearing at staff is suspension. We have managed the issue up until now (without Michael being suspended), but ignoring such outbursts is not sustainable in the long-term.

Coding of the interview transcripts from teachers also revealed a lack of knowledge and understanding in relation to Michael's needs. One example reads:

> I know that Michael is a looked-after child, I remember you telling us that at the start of the year. But I don't really understand what that means and how it affects Michael.

This need is also recognised in the Minutes of a recent LAC Review – the Chair noted that 'all staff at Beechgrove College should receive training to ensure that Michael's complex needs are adequately met'. The literature confirms the importance of providing such training. For example, Slade & Wissow (2007) concluded that 'greater awareness of maltreatment could lead teachers to respond more effectively to students who are behaviourally difficult' (p. 612).

As mentioned in the methodology, I was keen to ascertain the views of the teacher who awarded Michael the lowest Total Difficulties Score. I asked this teacher about the strategies they use with Michael – it was interesting that Michael named this teacher as

someone who he has a good relationship with. In relation to managing Michael's behaviour, some of the teacher feedback included:

> Sometimes you have to ignore minor things, or at least address them in an unobtrusive manner.
>
> If you have to address something significant with Michael it's best to do this after class, when everyone has left. He does have a tendency to act up in front of his peers.
>
> The 'time-out' facility is invaluable with Michael. Sometimes he just needs 5-10 minutes to calm down.

The 'time-out' facility struck particular resonance with me, and is also a strategy which Phillips (2007) recommends for LAC. From analysing the behaviour management entries for Michael, most major breaches of discipline occur when he becomes escalated – with which Michael himself concurred. Of course having such a facility is not in itself sufficient. It still requires teachers to be able to skilfully gauge Michael's mood prior to deciding if a 'cooling-off' period is needed. To date, Michael lacks this self-awareness, which is exemplified in the Minutes of a Core Group Meeting where his psychotherapist reported that 'Michael's emotional development is significantly impaired and is approximately 5 years behind a normal developmental trajectory'. As the above teacher elucidates, staff must ensure that their own style of classroom management is not the trigger for such escalation. In my meeting with Steve from the BST it was agreed that the strategies mentioned by this teacher would be shared with all staff during the training session. Although such features are nothing new when it comes to managing pupils with behavioural issues, the training had the added value of explaining why such strategies are needed when working with LAC like Michael.

It should also be noted that the SDQ data from staff allowed Michael's referral to the BST to be expedited, and so we were able to access the necessary support more quickly. According to Marquis & Flynn (2008), this is a further advantage of using the SDQ questionnaire.

It is perhaps no surprise that Michael's foster carer (Susan) initially provided the lowest Total Difficulties Score from the SDQ questionnaire – her result of 18/40 is significantly lower than the teachers' average score of 25.5/40. Richards et al. (2006) ask us to be mindful that LAC may act out at school more because of extra demands placed on them in that setting, including higher social skills, difficulties maintaining peer relationships, compliant behaviour and the challenges of academic work. In contrast, the home is a care-specific setting. As such, Tarren-Sweeney et al. (2004) advise us that a lack of agreement in SDQ scores doesn't signify poor reliability. Despite the differences, Susan's score of 18/40 still represents a 'substantial risk of significant problems' – this is noteworthy as Michael and his subject teachers also generated Total Difficulties Scores indicative of 'substantial risk'. Such triangulation further reinforces the need to intervene. These scores are probably to be expected as Michael presents with many of the features that Zima et al. (2000) identify as predictors of behavioural difficulties i.e. male, secondary school age, history of prolonged emotional abuse.

My interview with Susan revealed that she is an experienced foster carer, having provided care to a number of LAC. It was apparent that Susan's experience has allowed her to acquire a better understanding of the needs of LAC. For example, she commented that:

> Prior to Michael, I've provided foster care for 5 other children. Every one of them has different problems, but they've also a lot in common. I suppose you just learn over time what's the best way to handle them. So

> with Michael, who's got a bit of a temper, I just don't take him on when he's in that type of mood.

It was interesting to note that when Susan initially became a foster carer, she attended a number of training seminars, and still does so (although less frequently). The value of the training is clear from one of her responses.

> The training makes you aware of the types of problems that these children have faced in their own families. I mean, they come into foster care with lots of baggage and you have to be aware of that. The training gave me a real appreciation of their difficulties and why they sometimes have the issues that they do.

What struck me, was that staff at Beechgrove College are unlikely to have that knowledge and understanding which allows Susan to have a '*real appreciation*' of LAC needs. This confirmed to me the importance of designing the intervention in such a way that staff become more aware of the relationship between maltreatment and behaviour. Susan's unwillingness '*to take Michael on*' triangulates with those teachers who provide Michael with a 'time-out' – this is definitely a de-escalation strategy worth pursuing.

Using a wide range of data (as shown in Table 2) helped us to tailor the intervention to Michael's specific needs. This has been deliberate, as research (Ferguson & Wolkow, 2012; Luke et al., 2014) would indicate that a one-size-fits-all approach is inappropriate when deciding what interventions to use with LAC. Luke et al. (2014) would also recommend that 'those designing interventions should explore the opportunity to include components where adult and child work together for part of the time, as these offer a promising avenue for future work' (p. 16). Involving Michael in the design has been a further attempt to personalise the intervention.

5.7 Should attachment theory be the sole focus?

The training focused strongly on attachment theory and for good reason. Very few teachers had a good understanding of this theory (only 10 out of 56), and yet it provides a robust theoretical framework for understanding why LAC like Michael present with problem behaviour. Phillips (2007) believes that 'an attachment perspective can make a valuable contribution to understanding the learning needs of vulnerable children' (p. 28). However I have also found an argument put forward by Luke et al. (2014) to be very convincing, which is that:

> Attachment theory should not be regarded as the sole framework for understanding children's behaviour: many effective programmes also incorporate social learning theory. (p. 16)

This perhaps points to a weakness of my intervention, which may have focused too narrowly on attachment theory as a means of ameliorating Michael's behaviour. Bandura (1977), one of the leading authors in the field of social learning theory, makes us aware that new patterns of behaviour can be acquired through direct experience or by observing the behaviour of others. Behaviour is therefore learned, at least in rough form, before it is performed. Given their social milieu, schools represent powerful environments where behaviour can be shaped. I was excited by this theory, particularly when I related it to a number of articles by Gilligan (1999, 2007b) which focused on the importance of spare-time activities and leisure pursuits for LAC.

These activities allow LAC to engage in social communities where they can develop friendships. This is very important given that Bolger et al. (1998) highlighted how maltreated children are less popular with their peers than are non-maltreated children. Bryderup & Trentel (2013) also identify a lack of social relationships as one of the most

common characteristics of LAC who performed less well at school. According to these perspectives, children who have been abused (like Michael) learn negative models of relationships based on interactions with parents, and then generalise these models to their peer group. These children can also avoid relationships with others through fear of further rejection. In contrast, positive experiences with peers help maltreated children to learn appropriate social behaviour, thus ameliorating some of the negative sequelae of maltreatment. Therefore promoting LAC involvement in spare-time activities may help to more appropriately guide their entry into the peer world, as these forums are more likely to provide examples of proper behaviour.

It is worth noting that the initial SDQ scores from Michael's teachers and foster carer showed that in relation to the Peer Problem Score, he had 'significant problems'. Even scores from Michael's self-completed SDQ form 'may reflect significant problems' in peer relationships. My interview with the foster carer appeared to triangulate this – she revealed that, 'Michael really doesn't go out of the house that much …. he seems happy to stay in his room and play on the computer'. Similar outcomes were evident in the 'Prosocial Score' which may reinforce that Michael is lacking the social skills needed for successful peer interaction. Although I won't have the scope to introduce a second action cycle, promoting Michael's involvement in the rich variety of extra-curricular activities at Beechgrove College is something that I have explored with him during the post-intervention interview (reinforcing the participatory approach I was endeavouring to promote). I am pleased to say that as of 18th April 2015, Michael is attending the school's basketball club and has signed up for the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. The Department for Education and Employment (2000) would justify this proactive approach. They advise that adults involved in the care of LAC, which includes

Designated Teachers, should be constantly alert to opportunities to encourage talents and interests. Gilligan (1999) also highlights a common tendency for professionals to discount the value of mainstream opportunities which exist in the child's life, such as school. Indeed he argues that LAC may gain more, therapeutically, from engagement in 'ordinary' activities which are removed from the stigma of specialist treatment.

Bretherton (1992) reminds us that children need to develop secure dependence before launching into unfamiliar situations. It could be argued that the attachment reparation work (which the intervention promoted) serves as the groundwork needed to help facilitate Michael's participation in these activities. I therefore want to highlight something that isn't very explicit in the literature i.e. the real synergy that exists between the theories of 'attachment' and 'social learning', which is reinforced in the following paragraph.

In addition to fostering peer relationships, Gilligan (1999) outlines a number of other benefits which LAC experience as a result of their involvement in spare-time activities e.g. provides them with a sense of achievement and promotes self-efficacy/self-esteem (something very precious in lives which are likely to have seen little success or sustained involvement in anything); allows potential access to a significant adult who may perform a mentoring role; facilitates self-discipline which Cameron & Maginn (2009) argue is as important as cognitive ability in predicting future academic success. These outcomes can be linked to the concept of resilience which Rutter (2007) defines as 'the relative resistance to environmental risk experiences, or the overcoming of stress or adversity' (p. 205) – something that is very relevant to LAC. Resilience resides not so much in the person, but in their circumstances. Indeed Gilligan (2008) argues for resilience to be used

as an organising concept in enabling LAC to succeed in education, and this is an area that I would certainly like to research further. Interestingly, an approach that seeks to change teacher attitudes in relation to LAC (which the intervention has sought to do) would be regarded as resilience enhancing. We could therefore conclude that a teacher's knowledge of attachment is crucial in understanding the needs of LAC, but offers even more potential when used as part of a resilience-led framework.

6. Conclusion

One of the key messages I have taken from this piece of research is that schools have the potential to play a very supportive role for LAC. Indeed Howard et al. (1999) specifically identify school as a protective factor as it can act as a secure base providing stability and security. The structure of school can give back a certain logic and predictability for LAC whose entire world has been turned upside down. This routine, and also the safety offered by schools, can be powerfully therapeutic for children who have suffered early maltreatment – what Walker (1994: p. 344) describes as 'normal and normalising experiences'. And yet LAC have often been an overlooked group within the education system, seen to be the concern of social workers rather than teachers. Jackson (2013) would forcefully argue that if society's aim of preventing the social exclusion of LAC is to be successful, schools must take more responsibility for helping to address their underachievement – a position I would strongly agree with.

LAC are often uniquely challenged when it comes to their educational achievement. And although solvable, the task is certainly an awesome one – the most recent figures in N. Ireland showing that in 2012/13 only 27% of LAC attained 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-C compared to a figure of 80% for the general school population. Data like this also reaffirms that for LAC, the normal channels of pastoral support in school are inadequate. Instead, exceptional educational interventions are required to compensate for the disadvantages that these young people face as a result of their pre-care/care experience. Indeed Pecora (2012) would contend that the only way for LAC to have a fighting chance is for researchers and educators to implement innovative programs that help these students succeed. As Vice Principal with responsibility for LAC, I therefore felt justified

in intervening. Such action was aimed at improving educational outcomes for a looked-after child called Michael, and others similar to him in the future.

One of the principal challenges which teachers face in relation to LAC is managing their behaviour – this was a prominent risk factor for Michael. As such, the basis of our intervention was to provide teachers with extra training which would allow them to better understand and manage Michael's behavioural difficulties. This recognises that the average teacher does not possess an understanding of LAC behaviour since their period of initial teacher education wouldn't have included learning about psychological models like attachment theory. This was a void that the training was attempting to address.

At first glance, the intervention appeared to have been unsuccessful as at the end of the evaluative period, the data indicated a deterioration in Michael's behaviour. However the potential impact of the training was mitigated by a significant and unexpected development – prior to the post-intervention data being collected, Michael was told that he would be moving to another foster home, further adding to his history of anxious attachment. The literature review highlighted the association between placement disruption and behaviour problems, which appears to have been borne out in Michael's case. Another conclusion is that the training has helped staff to better understand how a child's pre-care experience can affect behaviour. Equipped with a greater awareness of the impact of maltreatment and disrupted attachment, there was evidence that teachers were responding to Michael's behaviour with more empathy. I reported instances of teachers softening their authoritarian approach which had previously led to escalations in Michael behaviour. Teachers were instead showing a higher level of responsiveness, and reacting in a more appropriate and non-punitive manner. This helps to establish a feeling

of emotional safety, which according to Woodier (2011) is paramount for children like Michael, given the maltreatment he has experienced. It is also possible that the training will encourage teachers to be more responsive to other LAC who attend the school currently, or in the future. Of course we need to be careful when it comes to generalisations, given the different cohorts of need within the LAC population. At the very most, this study may offer a useful insight when it comes to intervening with LAC who share some of Michael's background and behavioural issues.

My research highlighted the importance of confronting negative attitudes to LAC as challenging learners – the Department for Education and Employment (2000) identifies this as being critical to improving educational outcomes. It is therefore important that an understanding of the effects of childhood trauma and disrupted attachment does not materialise into a lowering of teacher expectations. There must be confidence and belief in the capacities of LAC like Michael – as Fletcher-Campbell (1998) notes, 'the starting point being what looked-after children can do, rather than what they can't' (p. 10).

At this stage it is worth reinforcing the rationale which underpinned the intervention - training would allow staff to better understand and manage Michael's maladaptive behaviours, reducing the very real risk of him being suspended/expelled from Beechgrove College. Rather than telling staff to change their style of behaviour management, I instead wanted them (through training) to understand why LAC like Michael are deserving of a more empathetic approach. I presented evidence which suggests some success in this respect. This then mitigates the chances of Michael being forced to move school (or having time out of school) – such disruption is a significant risk factor in terms of attainment. With Sullivan et al. (2010) also suggesting that a change in school would

further exacerbate behavioural difficulties, keeping Michael enrolled at Beechgrove College has to be a top priority. As such, I would strongly agree with McAuley & Trew (2000) who argue that the needs of LAC should be addressed at qualifying and post-qualifying teacher training levels. This will help to break the cycle of academic failure for LAC.

Schofield & Beek (2006) argue that 'education is a key area where attachment-related issues interact with other factors to affect progress' (p. 319). It is therefore important that teachers have an understanding of attachment theory, which my research would reinforce. I gathered evidence which suggests that when teachers know about attachment difficulties (as a result of the training), they were able to develop more effective ways of managing Michael's behavioural difficulties e.g. an approach that was more responsive and less punitive. This is significant given the research which has identified the teacher as a 'specific attachment person' (Geddes, 2006), and highlights the attachment reparative work which schools can perform. When identifying the factors that support the educational attainment of LAC, Gilligan (2007a) believes that 'the importance of teachers cannot be overemphasised' (p. 139). This justifies the specific attention we have given to the continuing professional development of staff at Beechgrove College, so that the school can promote attachment security for LAC like Michael.

The training of teachers at Beechgrove College was a collaborative venture – Steve from the BST, and Mary, an educational psychologist, each played an integral role in its design and delivery. We may have been occupying what Edwards et al. (2010: p. 27) refer to as a 'new space of action' where schools, in collaboration with other services, undertake responsive work with vulnerable young people like Michael. My research would support

that of Honey et al. (2011) in highlighting the promising avenues for educational psychologists to work with schools in the delivery of training. Mary was well placed to explain how the behaviour of LAC like Michael can be impacted upon by their pre-care/care experiences. Her presentation was mentioned by a number of staff as being very influential in terms of its impact on their professional practice. It is also a strong endorsement of the multi-disciplinary approach favoured by Luke et al. (2014). And yet the research highlighted the fragmented relationship between education and child welfare professionals - it was concerning that as a school we were only told at a late stage that Michael would be changing foster placement. Promoting inter-agency collaboration is certainly one of my future objectives in terms of helping LAC like Michael succeed in education.

I believe that Michael's involvement in the design and evaluative stages strengthened the intervention. As a result of being more participatory, a sense of social inclusion was fostered which appeared to have particular resonance for Michael e.g. by being aware of the school's willingness to help, he felt more valued and cared for. Michael's involvement also enabled us to tailor the intervention so that it was more attuned to his specific difficulties – most notably, his challenging behaviour. Given the heterogeneity that exists within the LAC population in terms of need, flexible responses like this are likely to be more successful than a one-size-fits-all approach. Indeed it is this focus on the individual which has provided further avenues of thought for supporting Michael. This includes encouraging him to become more involved in the school's programme of extra-curricular activities – something that would be strongly favoured by Gilligan (1999, 2007b). Such opportunities are likely to bring Michael into more contact with prosocial adults and teenagers, which in line with social learning theory, may have an ameliorating

effect on his behaviour. It is interesting that a review of the literature by Leve et al. (2012) identified that LAC interventions are more likely to be successful when based on a combination of attachment theory and social learning theory. The research has allowed me to fully appreciate the value of this perspective, which I can now take forward as Vice Principal in order to improve the educational outcomes for LAC who attend Beechgrove College.

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8. Appendices

Appendix A – SDQ form completed by Michael's teachers and his foster carer

Instructions: For each item, please mark the box for Not True, Somewhat True or Certainly True. It would help us if you answered all items as best you can even if you are not absolutely certain.

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
1. Considerate of other people's feelings			
2. Restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long			
3. Often complains of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness			
4. Shares readily with other children, for example toys, treats, pencils			
5. Often loses temper			
6. Rather solitary, prefers to play alone			
7. Generally well behaved, usually does what adults request			
8. Many worries or often seems worried			
9. Helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill			
10. Constantly fidgeting or squirming			
11. Has at least one good friend			
12. Often fights with other children or bullies them			
13. Often unhappy, depressed or tearful			
14. Generally liked by other children			
15. Easily distracted, concentration wanders			
16. Nervous or clingy in new situations, easily loses confidence			
17. Kind to younger children			
18. Often lies or cheats			
19. Picked on or bullied by other children			
20. Often volunteers to help others (parents, teachers, other children)			
21. Thinks things out before acting			
22. Steals from home, school or elsewhere			
23. Gets along better with adults than with other children			
24. Many fears, easily scared			
25. Good attention span, sees chores or homework through to the end			

Appendix B – SDQ form completed by Michael

Instructions: For each item, please mark the box for Not True, Somewhat True or Certainly True. It would help us if you answered all items as best you can even if you are not absolutely certain.

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
1. I try to be nice to other people. I care about their feelings			
2. I am restless, I cannot stay still for long			
3. I get a lot of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness			
4. I usually share with others, for example, CDs, games, food			
5. I get very angry and often lose my temper			
6. I would rather be alone than with other people of my age			
7. I usually do what I am told			
8. I worry a lot			
9. I am helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill			
10. I am constantly fidgeting or squirming			
11. I have one good friend or more			
12. I fight a lot. I can make other people do what I want			
13. I am often unhappy, depressed or tearful			
14. Other people my age generally like me			
15. I am easily distracted, I find it difficult to concentrate			
16. I am nervous in new situations. I easily lose confidence			
17. I am kind to younger children			
18. I am often accused of lying or cheating			
19. Other children or young people pick on me or bully me			
20. I often volunteer to help others (parents, teachers, children)			
21. I think before I do things			
22. I take things that are not mine from home, school or elsewhere			
23. I get along better with adults than with people of my own age			
24. I have many fears, I am easily scared			
25. I finish the work I'm doing. My attention is good			

Appendix C – The individual SDQ items and the Total score derived from them

Standard value for data entry	Not True 0	Somewhat True 1	Certainly True 2	
Data element	**Item Score**			**Summary Score**
Emotional Symptoms Scale				0-10
Item 3	0	1	2	
Item 8	0	1	2	
Item 13	0	1	2	
Item 16	0	1	2	
Item 24	0	1	2	
Conduct Problem Scale				0-10
Item 5	0	1	2	
Item 7	*2*	*1*	*0*	
Item 12	0	1	2	
Item 18	0	1	2	
Item 22	0	1	2	
Hyperactivity Scale				0-10
Item 2	0	1	2	
Item 10	0	1	2	
Item 15	0	1	2	
Item 21	*2*	*1*	*0*	
Item 25	*2*	*1*	*0*	
Peer Problem Scale				0-10
Item 6	0	1	2	
Item 11	*2*	*1*	*0*	
Item 14	*2*	*1*	*0*	
Item 19	0	1	2	
Item 23	0	1	2	
Prosocial Scale				0-10
Item 1	0	1	2	
Item 4	0	1	2	
Item 9	0	1	2	
Item 17	0	1	2	
Item 20	0	1	2	
SDQ Total Difficulties Score (out of 40) = Sum of Scales below				
• **Emotional Symptoms Scale**				0-10
• **Conduct Problem Scale**				0-10
• **Hyperactivity Scale**				0-10
• **Peer Problem Scale**				0-10

NB. Items in italics indicate reverse scoring

Appendix D – Interview schedules

Teachers – initial interview

- The interview started off by going through the responses that the teacher had given on the SDQ form. The exact line of questioning (and subsequent discussion) was therefore tailored towards the individual responses.
- What do you find most challenging about Michael's behaviour?
- What's his standard of work like in your class?
- How much knowledge and understanding do you have when it comes to looked-after children?
- After outlining the content of the staff training, I asked whether they thought this would help.
- Would you recommend any strategies that can be used to help manage Michael's behaviour?

Teachers – follow-up interviews

- Do you think the training has helped in terms of understanding Michael's behaviour?
- What part of the training did you find most helpful?
- Have you tried any of the strategies which were suggested as part of the training?
- Are you treating Michael any differently now as a result of the training?
- How would you compare Michael's behaviour now compared to three months ago? This is designed to promote further discussion about the factors related to the change in the scores, and involved comparing the pre- and post-intervention SDQ scores.
- Is there anything else which you feel we could do to help manage Michael's behaviour?

Michael – initial interview

- I started the interview with Michael by allowing him (with guidance) to score the SDQ, which was designed to increase his understanding of the five separate Scales and the Total Difficulties Score. We then took some time to compare these scores to those supplied by his teachers and foster carer.
- Do you think the scores provided by your teachers are fair?
- How do you think we could work towards reducing some of these scores?
- Which teachers do you get on with the best? Why do you think that is the case?
- Do you think teachers treat you any differently because you are a looked-after child? Do you think they should?
- Are you aware that LAC tend not to do as well as their peers at school? Do you know the reasons for this?
- I also took time to explain to Michael about the rationale for the staff training and the content of the training. I asked him about whether he had any ideas about additional things that should be included in the training. I also asked Michael if he was happy for teachers to be informed that he is a looked-after child.

Michael – follow-up interview

- How do you think your behaviour has been of late?
- What do you think of your SDQ scores now compared to three months ago? This question was the stimulus for further discussion.
- Do you think teachers are treating you a little bit differently as a result of their training?
- Do you think it has been useful for you to be involved in this piece of research?
- What are your plans after you complete your GCSEs?
- Are you involved in any activities inside or outside of school?
- Is there anything else which we as a school could do to help?

Foster carer interview

- The interview started off by comparing the SDQ scores which the foster parent provided vis-à-vis those provided by Michael and also the average teacher scores. A number of relevant questions would flow from this analysis.
- What experience have you in terms of fostering? How do you feel this has helped in terms of caring for Michael?
- What do you believe are Michael's strengths and weaknesses?
- Are you aware that LAC tend not to do as well as their peers at school? Do you know the reasons for this?
- Would you recommend any strategies that you use at home to help manage Michael's behaviour?
- Do you think that the training of staff, in terms of making them more aware of the needs of LAC, is a good idea?
- Is there anything else that the school could be doing to support Michael?
- Does Michael have many friends outside of school? Is he involved in any activities/hobbies?

Appendix E – Evaluation of Training

I would appreciate if you could provide some feedback of the training that has taken place today. There is no need to put your name on the Evaluation Form.

Please tick the relevant box for the following statements.

Statement	Yes	No
I received training on the needs of looked-after children when I was training to be a teacher		
I have received training on the needs of looked-after children during my career as a teacher		
I am aware of who the looked-after children are that I teach		
Prior to the training I had a good understanding of Attachment Theory		

As a result of the training, please indicate your response to each of the following statements by ticking one of the three boxes.

Statement	Certainly True	Somewhat True	Not True
I am more aware of how abuse and maltreatment can negatively affect a pupil's behaviour			
I now better understand why looked-after children can sometimes present with challenging behaviour			
I am more likely to show empathy in response to the behavioural issues which LAC can sometimes present with			
I am more aware of strategies which can help to manage the disruptive behaviour of some looked-after children			
I found the training useful and will be able to apply it in the classroom			

Please provide some brief comments for each of the following questions.

What aspect of the training did you find most helpful?

Is there anything that you would like more information on as a result of the training?